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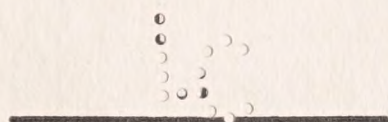
THE CLIENT

A Novel

by

SHERMAN MILLWOOD

William M. S. Doughty.



PHILADELPHIA

September, 1904

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Preface

THE preface to this story is not intended to be apologetic, but that it should be somewhat explanatory is considered advisable. Public sentiment in matters of morality is often misguided because it is unreal. It is thus as a matter of common honesty unworthy, and as it is unworthy it should be condemned.

Fire is sometimes the only successful agency that can be used in fighting fire ; also when a mechanic tries to regulate the flow of a congested sewer, he feels that excuses would be ridiculous, and that the end justifies the means.

It was not without some feelings of repugnance that the author in writing this narrative took up certain portions of his task. There is much that with regret he left unsaid, and much that he has said he would have gladly omitted. In telling the truth, he has aimed to be explicit enough only to convey the desired effect. He has not sought to create new problems in this world of guesswork, but has earnestly endeavored to solve an old one. He does not seek to justify his views, save by the argument presented in this narrative, and would rather suffer his words to be misinterpreted than to submit harsh proofs of their truth at the expense of what are oftentimes the misdirected efforts of humanity to be good.

From those who by inheritance or self-discipline have minds that master all emotions, or from those with weak minds and weaker emotions, the writer expects only criticism and abuse. He accords them this privilege by recognizing a law of nature in the creation of life. If the charity he accords to human frailty is misleading in its moral influence ; if the severity with which he criticises the Pharisee is wrong, he would only note that these attitudes of forbearance and justice are common to the hearts of many men, and that at the dawn of Christian history, misguided public sentiment caused the death on the Cross of One, who thus taught them mercy for erring mortals, and whose social position on earth was not impaired thereby, save in the minds of those who crucified Him. But from those who have sounded the depths and shoals of human frailty, and whose senses have been so attuned to nature that their gratification or repression has made this life to them a heaven or a hell, he expects only sympathy and gratitude. In Divinely created, but Satan seduced, man he has sought to disintegrate his dual nature and to draw a perceptible dividing line between the influences of love and lust. Keenly realizing how utterly futile are the influences of Christian morality in regulating the lives of a vast proportion of humanity, he has endeavored to reveal to them the inexorable laws of nature in an argument which appeals only to the senses, and that higher intelligence which ever seeks ideals.

Introduction

ON a stormy afternoon in February Ambrose Pierce sat alone in his office in Clifton Street. Tilted back in his chair, his feet crossed, and resting upon a desk that was littered over with legal documents and books of law, he intently watched the thin wreaths of blue smoke that rose toward the ceiling from a partly consumed cigar.

In deep thought, and oblivious to the storm that raged without, the alternate lights and shadows that appeared and disappeared upon his usually sombre face were indications of that chief attribute of a successful lawyer—versatility—if nothing more. For Ambrose Pierce was a lawyer and at one time had been successful and prominent in his profession. He was forty-three years of age, and in appearance was not pleasant to look upon. Over six feet tall; angular, raw boned and irregular features, a high retreating forehead indicative of powerful but slow perception; a massive jaw; small deep sunken eyes, dull and expressionless in repose, but which when lighted by the fire of passionate energy were capable of expressing the deepest emotion a human heart can feel. These unprepossessing characteristics were partially offset by a profusion of dark auburn hair and moustache, slightly streaked with gray; a well formed mouth and white regular teeth. In fact there were some people who thought Am-

brose Pierce good-looking when he smiled. He was habitually slow motioned and awkward, but when roused to action these faults seemed but to intensify his deadly earnestness and impetuous fascination. He was careless in his dress, but methodical, systematic and accurate in business. He possessed a selective memory, almost infallible in its accuracy; a gift of perception so intense in its penetration that his first impressions were almost invariably correct. Fair and just to his clients in a practice extending over a period of ten years, he had never prosecuted a case that could not be won and had never lost a case that could be won, but he was now an unpopular lawyer, and unsuccessful because unpopular, though superficially there were no apparent good reasons for his lost prestige.

As a high spirited romantic and imaginative boy of sixteen, whose chief amusement was the construction of air castles, he had been at this early age thrown upon his own resources, and in the rude awakening that followed he was soon forced to realize that a seven roomed house was really a great problem. This serious phase of his life was accentuated by the fact that though he possessed a good common school education his real education began when he closed his school-books. It was then his experience to secure employment with a man who in business was severely practical, and also a past master in questionable business methods. This man, brilliant, sagacious and with a magnetic personality, in a period of ten years so influenced and moulded the youthful mind of Ambrose that in a mental sense he was to a great extent recreated. On leaving this employer, it was again his expe-

rience to be associated for several years with a man quite notorious as a plunging promoter, who also taught Ambrose all he knew.

At last when near thirty years of age he parted for good from these adepts in business trickery, the law, without reflecting upon it as a profession, seemed to afford a natural and lucrative opening for his ambition and ability.

After a few years of study he was admitted to the bar, and though he had been taught and almost believed that business honor defined meant respect for the law, he still felt an inherent sense of justice and equity for his fellow man, that now responsible to himself alone he used with discretion and care, both to his business advantage and his self-respect.

As a lawyer he had realized from many bitter experiences in the past that his natural indolence and slow perception were the greatest barriers to success in a vocation where ready wit and quick intuition were of vital importance. So as a matter of course it followed that in a determined effort to overcome this failing his brain became abnormally active and his gift of penetration correspondingly acute. In almost every phase of his business he could correctly anticipate what would be said and done, and so in court was ever ready for attack or defense. In his arguments he possessed a personal magnetism that was irresistible. He used no gestures, but depended on the attitude of his body, the expression of his eyes, and the carefully modulated cadences of a charming voice that lulled the senses to repose and forgetfulness of right or wrong, and then with repressed intensity swept away all opposition and established conviction in

the place of doubt and uncertainty. In reality he fought his cases, he did not plead them. He always insisted that his clients should tell him the truth and not to misrepresent the facts of a case. The fact that he scarcely ever hesitated to tell the truth to his clients showed a deliberate carelessness in matters of business discretion. On one occasion a lady had called to retain him in a suit against her husband for desertion. In telling her story the real facts were quite apparent to the lawyer, and though she claimed to be a suffering martyr as a result of her husband's conduct, Ambrose told her that the reason she was a martyr was because she deserved to be one.

On another occasion one of his clients, a wealthy man whose real estate interests were very extensive, had asked him to foreclose a small mortgage which he held on a valuable property owned by a man who at the time was in serious financial trouble, by reason of his brother's failure in business, and also sick in bed with typhoid fever. The client felt that this would be an excellent chance to secure a valuable property, but his smile as he so expressed himself met with no response from Ambrose, who replied that he was conscientiously opposed to taking blood money, but that he would observe his client's wishes; after saying which he deliberately postponed action in the matter until the unfortunate debtor was able to protect himself and save his home.

Ambrose was next elected to the legislature, but like all politicians who successfully aspire to office he had to go under the fence instead of over it. As a candidate he was ostensibly the champion of the

people's rights, but in reality he was bound by strict obligations to work for the interests of a rich corporation who desired a valuable state franchise, the gift of which would be inimical to the public welfare. As a candidate Ambrose worked hard, made many speeches and was elected. When the franchise in question came up for consideration he promptly voted against it, and when the corporation desiring the franchise, and which had spent considerable money to elect him charged him with breaking his promise he said with his most amiable smile, "It is true I made a few promises to you. In fact they were positive promises, but in the speeches I made to the people on many occasions I repeatedly pledged myself to work for their best interests. In satisfying my conscience as to this particular matter I felt that I should sin less in breaking my promises to you than in breaking those I had made to thousands of men who voted for and elected me."

His career as a politician was thus virtually ended, though he subsequently was appointed as judge of a criminal court and served a term of three years. While on the bench many of his decisions were adversely commented on, and on several occasions he was severely criticised. One decision in particular aroused a storm of public criticism. Several wretched girls, social outcasts, were arrested and brought before him. They were young and attractive, but poorly dressed. With tear-stained faces they told the judge that they were willing to work, but were homeless and starving and had begged for help. The judge asked the officers to produce the man or men who were responsible for

their dishonor, and as this could not be done he discharged them. The criticism he received for this action from bodies of society women was especially severe and merciless, and the degree of their condemnation, aided by a subservient press, seemed only to be measured by the distance that good fortune and discretion had removed them from the possibility of a fate similar to that of the miserable creatures whom they thus indirectly persecuted. To all this Ambrose disdained to make any reply save to remark that when the great Nazarene was on earth, He, in His treatment of fallen women had given the world a precept it well might follow. As a judge he also recommended the regulation of certain vices by secret service law. He contended that bad people washed were better than bad people dirty, and that the bath-tub properly used was useful in cleaning souls as well as bodies. He objected to the washing of soiled linen in the columns of the daily press. He said that the most severe and unfair judge of sinners was the man or woman who had reformed for business reasons. He said the world was bad enough, and that misguided morality should not be allowed to get on a pedestal with the only result of making it worse. He said that the public health morally and physically was of more importance than the public conscience. He did not mean to say, "what is the use of trying to be good?"—but he did think a man was a fool who tried to sweep back the ocean waves with a broom. These radical views caused his retirement from the bench, and as he returned to private life and resumed his practice of law, he sadly realized that though advanced ideas were essential to the develop-

ment and progress of a nation they were as a rule a barrier to success individually.

Ambrose Pierce had married at the age of thirty-three. Always an admirer of beauty, he had chosen for a wife a plain honest girl of respectable family, and who throughout all their wedded life had faithfully loved him, though no children had blessed their union. In marrying her he had tacitly obeyed the teachings of his former cold-blooded business preceptors; that in selecting a wife a man should observe the same business judgment that he would use in buying a horse. He had succeeded so admirably in this business phase of the matter that the sentiment of the honeymoon was quickly dispelled, and from then up to the time this narrative begins, the business rules that dominated him as a lover had thoroughly influenced his conduct as a husband. He was of course unhappy, and fully realized the cause, but he had reached a mature age without the power to make or retain friends, and we can readily understand why, for with the exception of his wife's pure love the only emotions he seemed to inspire in others were those of fear or fascination, so that to the world and in himself he was living and had lived an involuntary dual life.

He could not separate in himself the inherent attributes of God, given him by Christian birth and training as a boy, when these qualities had been so repressed by master minds dominating his very existence, that he sometimes felt honestly justified in questioning his mental parentage. These ideas of Ambrose were not illusions, their affects upon him were plainly perceptible, but never understood. While he disdained to acknowledge fashions or

social forms, there were many times when he showed a courtly knowledge of both. When he felt so disposed his polite affability was intensely fascinating and winning. He was considered by many to be a dangerous man; for action to him meant accomplishment. He never worked save when he knew he could win and was never known to acknowledge defeat. He was slow to be convinced, but his convictions could not be changed. He did not believe in trying to solve the abstruse problems of the universe, save through natural laws, and looked through nature for nature's God. Beyond this he questioned the Infinite alone.

Two forces forever at war in his breast, had by constant clashing, so intensified his powers for good or evil that he felt alternate sensations of bliss or horror, as with trembling heart he stood at the portals of light and darkness and felt that he was privileged to seek in either realm for ideal life.

And so on this stormy winter day, as the hero of our story is thus introduced to the reader we find him in idle meditation, vaguely pondering with feelings misanthropic and almost agnostic on his past, his present, and his future life. Living beyond his time he seemed worldly wise in his knowledge of humanity to the limit of human intelligence. He felt that if the world mocked and starved some men while living and crowned them when dead, the ridicule and the crown were alike valueless; so, to him, this is a sad and dangerous hour; for with his lost prestige as a lawyer and consequent financial troubles, he remembers only his wife as he realizes that he has reached the parting of the ways.

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The Client

CHAPTER I

THE LAWYER AT WORK

THE howling of the storm without and the chilly temperature of his office at length roused Ambrose from his reverie. He placed his benumbed feet upon the floor and turning in his chair noted that his wood-fire was smouldering embers. He placed some well dried hickory wood upon the andirons and drawing a chair in front of the fireplace fanned the embers until a bright fire crackled and glowed therein. This firelight caused flickering shadows to assume fantastic shapes upon the walls and ceiling of the large, darkened room, and brought into strange relief the many oil paintings and steel engravings of old time judges and ecclesiastics in wig and gown, whose faces sombre and grim in the broad light of day seemed to take on grotesque expressions of merriment, as the firelight paled and shone. Several pedestals and bracket shelves also were repositories for time worn busts of old masters of legal lore. Ambrose had devoted considerable time and much good taste in his collection of these reproductions of ancient celebrities, and a number of large bookcases well filled with the best works

on subjects of instructive value to him professionally, gave to his "workshop" as he called it an impression of the "law's majesty"; that to his clients Ambrose always intensified or promptly dispelled according to the merits of their respective causes.

In a smaller room adjoining, a pale faced young man about twenty-five years of age was busily engaged in preparing from shorthand notes the defense that Ambrose was to make in a murder case that had been set for trial at a date now near at hand. This young man in his character and habits reflected in some degree the master mind that dominated him. Knowing everything he knew nothing, and his master's clients in their impatience to obtain information from him were often angered and disgusted by his slow non-committal answers to their inquiries, and by his apparent stupidity and ignorance.

A lull in the storm and the clicking of the typewriting machine under Adolph's expert fingers attracted the attention of Ambrose, who going in to him gave some notes and instructions; then walking to the window and putting his hands in his pockets he looked out upon the storm. In the street below were a few pedestrians carefully picking their way on the icy pavements, and whose umbrellas but partially shielded them from the sleet and wind. The branches of the trees were bending and cracking with their icy load, and occasionally when struck by an unusually hard blast would break and fall to the ground.

"A beastly day," muttered Ambrose; "surely if my fair client who desires a divorce comes here on

a day like this it will be safe to assume that she means business. Don't you think so, Adolph?"

Adolph, thus interrogated, looked up and replied, "Yes, sir, if in coming here to-day she chooses the least of two evils, we can consider it a fact that her husband is a bad one."

"In her coming here to-day, or her failure to come, there are a great many other deductions we might naturally make regarding her," said Ambrose. "All women are alike in matters of caprice and uncertainty, but where their hearts are deeply concerned they are open books to all who care to read them. If this woman comes to-day we can assume at once that she either loves her husband or she fears him, and it will be an easy matter to determine this question. Of course my decision to take her case or reject it will depend upon my deductions in the matter after talking to her. If I feel that she loves her husband I will take her case. If she loves another man, I won't."

"You think then, sir," said Adolph, "that if she loves another man you would rather have her husband for a client?"

"Precisely," said Ambrose, who seating himself at his desk picked up a pale blue delicately scented envelope and drew therefrom his prospective client's note of appointment.

"A, B, C," said Ambrose referring to the monogram at the top of the page, and he smiled grimly. "No, no, the woman never lived who was so plain, so easily understood." The note read as follows:

"JUDGE PIERCE,

"*My Dear Sir:* I write you at the suggestion

of Mrs. Weedahl, who is, I believe, a client of yours, and who has spoken favorably of you as a lawyer. I wish to secure a divorce from my husband, and will call upon you Thursday afternoon at 3:30 o'clock for the purpose of consulting you in regard to this matter. As I am totally unknown to you I desire by this letter to introduce myself, and at the same time to request of you the strictest privacy for our interview. If the day and hour I have named should not suit your convenience, kindly advise me at once and appoint another time.

“Very truly yours,

“ANNETTE B. CALDWELL.

“P. S. Please do not mention to any one but Mrs. Weedahl the nature of my business with you.

“A. B. C.”

Ambrose smiled as he placed the letter in its envelope. “Poor woman,” said he. “As is often the case in a woman’s letter, the postscript conveys its greatest meaning. One thing is certain, she either loves her husband or she fears him. She evidently knows but little of Mrs. Weedahl or myself. She is far from being ready to burn the bridges behind her. In the mind of almost anybody else Mrs. Weedahl’s endorsement of me would be tantamount to a conviction of all that is bad, but bah; what difference does it make? Fame—good or bad is often like life insurance—a game at which we must die to win.”

The hall door of the room adjoining opened and closed, and Adolph entered his master’s room bearing a card. “Mrs. Caldwell,” said he. Ambrose motioned for him to place a chair opposite his desk and in such a position that when the lady talked

with him the strongest light would be thrown upon her face. These preliminaries duly attended to, Ambrose arose from his chair as Mrs. Caldwell entered the room.

"Judge Pierce?" she said, inquiringly.

"Yes, madam," said Ambrose. "Be seated, please, or let me suggest first that you remove the cloak you have on, which seems very wet."

"Thank you," said she, as Ambrose assisted in removing the wrap and hung it on a chair before the fire.

"If you don't mind, I will sit by your cheerful fireplace a minute. I am nearly frozen." A plaintive smile appeared on her face as she said this, and as Ambrose placed a chair for her close to the fire, she seated herself, and with a shiver extended her hands and feet toward the genial warmth. Ambrose noted her movements with respectful admiration, and his interest in her, inspired by first impressions, was intense. She was perhaps thirty years of age. She was not strictly beautiful, but there was a charm about her that was almost instantaneously and delightfully perceptible to his every sense. She was above the medium height, graceful and well formed. Her luxuriant brown hair disarranged by the storm fell in picturesque confusion about a face that was remarkable for its sweetness of expression and consistency with her charming voice and smile. Ambrose had always been a critical admirer of physical beauty in women, but never before had he realized the many charming attributes that nature could lavishly bestow in its mature perfection. In his critical observation of some men and women he had often thought that nature in creating them had hesitated

too long before deciding upon their sex, but in his fair client he sacrilegiously thought that nature had deliberately planned and created a daughter of Eve whose charms were possibly greater than those of her ancestral mother, and whose virtue perhaps was less questionable. As she sat gazing at the fire her face in repose had a somewhat wan and hard expression, and she seemed for the moment forgetful of her surroundings, but she presently turned toward Ambrose and said with another smile, "You did not expect me to-day, did you? Now confess," said she, as Ambrose essayed to reply. "You think I am in a bad fix to come here to talk divorce on a day like this. Well, I am in serious trouble," and Ambrose noted the unshed tears in her eyes.

"Come," said he, "if you feel sufficiently warmed, take this chair here by my desk and tell me about it."

"Now," said she, as Ambrose with pencil and tablet prepared himself to note the essential features of her statement. "My name is Annette Borden Caldwell. My husband's name is Richard Ainsley Caldwell, and we have been married a little more than nine years. We do not reside in this city, but at Raleigh, which you know is twenty-three miles from here. My husband is sheriff of Prescott County. He is quite well known as a politician, and recently he has become well known in connection with a case that does not relate to politics at all. He is very much in love with another woman, and——"

"You said in love," said Ambrose, interrupting her. "Does his conduct toward you indicate that his feelings for her are those of love or infatuation?"

"Why, I don't believe that he loves her. I think it is simply infatuation. Before I discovered his perfidy he gave me everything I asked for; and when I asked for an explanation of his generosity he said he was squaring himself with his conscience, that was all he would say."

"And since you discovered his perfidy?"

"Well, since then he has given everything to her, and tells me to get out."

"But up to the present time you have been careful not to get out."

"Only once, and then he put me out, but I went back immediately."

"He seized you and forcibly put you out of the house? What did he say at the time he did this, and who else was present?"

"No other person was present at the time, but he said, 'get out and stay out,' and swore at me."

"What had you said or done to provoke this action on his part?"

"I had told him that I would not stand his conduct toward me, and that unless he reformed I would leave him."

"Did he strike you?"

"No, but he hurt me by the rough manner in which he grasped my arm and pushed me about."

"Now," said Ambrose, noting with his pencil, as he spoke. "Your husband forcibly put you out of the house, swore at you, and told you to get out and stay out?"

"Yes, sir."

At the request of Ambrose his client then made a statement in regard to the property possessed by her husband and his yearly income. She also told

him that her husband was a well known club-man ; that she had married him after an acquaintance of less than two months ; and that his neglect of her had begun in less than a year after their marriage.

In response to the lawyer's suggestions and pointed questions the sad truth was revealed that her husband was a heartless scoundrel, but that her fidelity for him was still unquestioned. After all these matters had been gone over in detail, Ambrose felt that she still loved her husband, and under this impression he also understood that her statements as to his misconduct had been in no way exaggerated, but that she showed a disposition to excuse his brutality. He had already decided that her case was a worthy one, but for the apparent lack of competent witnesses it would not do for him to be precipitate in legal action. He also felt that by reason of this important obstacle and her evident reluctance to tell the whole truth, that he was as her lawyer in duty bound both by question and comment to arrive at such an understanding of the entire state of affairs between them that he could make such intelligent deductions and inferences as would properly guide him in his successful prosecution of the case.

" Now, Mrs. Caldwell," said he, " it is patent to me as well as to you that your husband's love for this woman, like many other cases of so-called affection, is not an emotion that would stand in any degree the analysis that respectability would make ; but though his infatuation will undoubtedly be short-lived, it is for you only the beginning of the end. It is useless for you to delude yourself with the hope, which I feel you secretly entertain, as to

his reformation. You see, he has for many years practiced this deception toward you ; and now his contempt for your wifely forbearance finds expression in almost an open violation of his marriage vows. If it is not this woman it will be some one else, and further efforts on your part to do your duty as a wife will not only subject you to worse cruelty from him, but will forfeit for you the respect of all your friends. I fully understand your personal feelings in the matter, but as far as your financial helplessness is concerned leave that to me. We will force him to provide for you. You must go home to him, and stay there, but only until I tell you to leave. Your case is a worthy one, but you are sadly in need of competent witnesses, and evidence outside of your own statement we must obtain as quickly as possible. I am only your lawyer, and in that capacity my duty toward you is a plain one, but your helplessness inspires me with a feeling of pity which prompts me to speak also to you as a man. So forgive me if my interest in your case is suggestive of advice in this respect as well."

"Oh, sir," said his client with tearful eyes, "I am indeed helpless in every way. Please do not think me a silly woman. I—I cannot forget, but I pray you, indeed, talk to me as a man. Advise me as you would your sister. Tell me what to do, for I have no one else who is competent to instruct me."

"Tell me about your husband's mistress ; what is she like, in appearance ?"

"Oh, she is a perfect fright."

Ambrose smiled good-naturedly and looked at his client inquiringly.

"She is a tall, skinny, red-haired, hatchet-faced, brazen old thing."

Ambrose noted on his tablet, reading aloud as he wrote, "mistress of defendant above medium height, somewhat slender, auburn hair, delicate features, about twenty-five years old, self-possessed and chic."

"I didn't say she was slender and auburned haired; judge, I said she was skinny and red-headed."

"I know you did," said Ambrose, bowing.

"I didn't say she was twenty-five years old, self-possessed and chic. I said she was a brazen old thing."

Ambrose bowed again.

"Well now, will you please tell me why you describe her so differently from what I tell you?"

"For the reason," said Ambrose, "that you do not see her with your husband's eyes, but with your own, which is a very different matter."

"And have you given similar credence to all else I have said?"

"Not by any means," said Ambrose, "but I perceive you entertain an erroneous idea and I must explain. An intelligent woman's opinion of another woman, if unprejudiced, is worth far more than an intelligent man's opinion of the same woman, and we reverse this rule in getting a proper estimate of a man, but your opinion in this case is prejudiced and of course won't do, even though a woman best understands a woman, and a man best understands a man."

"I see," said his client smiling again, "you consider my statement correct save in respect to the

woman, but yet I don't believe you would think she is pretty."

Again Ambrose smiled.

"You know but little about men," said he, "in your estimate of their opinions as to a charming woman. All men in one respect are alike, and women sometimes weep indeed to find that this is true. As regards women men want only what other men want. I don't say this as a suggestion to you in winning your husband's love, for he is not worth the effort, and in your case, action by you, inspired by such an idea, would be indeed playing with fire, and you would be the most badly burned; however, the precept I have here suggested is an excellent one to adopt in many cases, but," said Ambrose, "perhaps this is tiresome to you."

"No, no, please go on."

"A woman who is a favorite with men is generally hated by other women. A woman who is a favorite with other women is, down in their hearts, of no interest whatever to men. The particular kind of congeniality she possesses and which makes her attractive to other women as a matter of sex is repulsive to man. Here lies the secret of men's aversion to and ridicule of women's clubs. A woman may be such a favorite with other women that she may be elected to the presidency of such a club, but the greater her prominence in this respect, the wider is the breach of sex between herself and man. To man, a woman must be a woman, and even when she fulfils the highest requirements of her sex toward him she sometimes has to work hard to win. This is sad to say an axiom in some degree applicable in your case, only you have failed,

and in my honest estimate of you, the man as your husband, who could leave you for another woman is simply a degenerate and nothing more. Please understand me that in thus referring to the affinity of man and woman, I speak only of the matter of sex. This to a pure mind might seem a matter of secondary importance, but the divorce courts of our country have proven it otherwise beyond all question of doubt."

Ambrose noted that his client was looking on him with an eager but despairing gaze.

"You intensify my sense of helplessness," said she.

"Then," said Ambrose, "let me help you by criticising you, when I call your husband a degenerate for leaving you; I mean to pay you an honest compliment, but I also mean much more. I will go further and say that these, my first impressions of you as a wife, could not be shaken by any future conduct of yours. My convictions as to you in this respect are fully established. No, no, I am not praising you. You are an honest woman, and you meant well, but you did not know. It is sometimes hard to tell whether the most trouble is caused by people who mean well and don't know, or by those who do know, but don't mean well. I will not say that your husband is a man who could be made to do right on any line of conduct that I could suggest for his wife's guidance, but I will say that your easy good nature perhaps has been a serious fault in you. You knew his emotional nature better than any one else, and in a figurative sense a wife should hold such a man by the throat and never let go. If she expects to live with him

she must force him to seek in her the attraction that he looks for elsewhere. Straining after sentiment is the rock upon which divorce wrecks marriage, and the wreck of your happiness has been thus caused by your husband's search for sensual ideals. Your refined emotions were such that you could not sink to his level, and he with his sensual nature could not rise to yours. Your honeymoon as in thousands of cases before yours, served but to reveal the chasm of uncongeniality that yawned between you, and thus you lost him. The incompatibility between you is absolute, and I believe hopeless. It is often the case and when so, it is thoroughly justifiable, that many married people are too honest to themselves to be false either to nature or their marriage vows, and I credit you with all that my words imply. People who are happily married would never understand this, but we hope there is a merciful God for those who do."

As Ambrose uttered these words a slight tremor was perceptible in his voice, and his client noticed that he spoke with averted gaze. He paused for a moment and as he looked up he saw that she was regarding him with a look of most intense and intelligent interest, but she did not attempt a reply. She leaned her head upon her hand, and with a handkerchief wiped away the tears she could no longer repress. Ambrose here noticed the gathering darkness and hastily consulting his watch found that it was growing late. This action was accepted by his client as a termination of the interview.

"Marriage, Mrs. Caldwell," said he, "may be a law of God, but its ideal features seem to end with this assumption. In every other respect it is a

problem which must be worked out under earthly conditions.

"As matters now stand I cannot restore your marriage happiness, I can only suggest a line of conduct to preserve your self-respect, and will do my best to give you the law's protection."

His client arose as one who wakes from a dream and as they stood in front of the fireplace she said softly, "May I come again to-morrow?"

"Not to-morrow," said Ambrose. "I have a case in court in the morning, and at present I think seriously of going out to Raleigh to see what I can learn of your husband. Trust me," said he, as a look of alarm appeared on her face. "I will not embarrass you."

"And I am to return to my home?" said she.

"Yes," said Ambrose; "come here again on Saturday at two o'clock. In the meantime avoid any dispute with your husband and show no interest in his movements. Be careful that no false interpretation be placed upon your own conduct. This is all you have to do."

When his client was ready to depart, she impulsively extended her hand to Ambrose, who returning the clasp, said, "I will go with you to the station. Your train will not leave for half an hour yet, so we have plenty of time. The station is less than two blocks from here. The storm seems to grow worse, so my assistance will be entirely proper," said he smilingly.

Leaving Adolph to make all secure the pair went out in the storm together, each with an undefinable sense of regret that their first meeting had terminated.

CHAPTER II

THE LAWYER AT HOME

AFTER Ambrose had escorted his fair client to her train he boarded an up-town car for home. He glanced over the head-lines of an evening paper, but for some reason he felt indisposed to read. A gentleman with whom he was slightly acquainted took the vacant seat beside him and attempted to engage him in conversation, but the replies of Ambrose were so laconic and devoid of interest that the gentleman soon abandoned his conversational efforts, and unfolding an evening paper proceeded to look it over. Ambrose gazed listlessly through the car window, watching the blurred and glaring lights of the various stores and business places they passed. The rain and sleet dashing against the windows rendered it impossible to recognize a locality and the hoarse voice of the conductor as he announced the street crossings in the crowded car seemed to Ambrose unusually irritating. In a nervous manner he repeatedly struck his knee with the folded paper as he recalled to mind in detail the visit of his unfortunate client, and he very quickly discovered that he was considering the charming personality of the lady to the utter exclusion of her business interests.

“How quickly the time passed,” he thought, “and what did I say to her? Was I indelicate?”

No, surely I was not. I was her friend ; I meant to be sympathetic and kind ; why, I even promised to go to Raleigh to look up evidence in her case. That was foolish. I will send Adolph. No, no—I will think it over and decide what to do to-morrow.”

He pulled his moustache in deep perplexity and then went on as before.

“ What charm has she exercised over me ? There is no affectation about her, absolutely none. Her voice, her eyes, her attitude are most naturally charming. Surely in all my life I have never been so impressed with a woman’s personality before. Her first words to me breathed a spirit of congeniality, that could only be compared to the balm of a spring morning. She seemed to awaken to life every dulled sense of manhood within me. Her every word and look seemed a caress. But, fie ! what folly this is. She is helpless, she needs a lawyer, and needs him badly ; that explains everything. The charm was her distress which simply awoke in me an honest sense of duty toward her. The appealing look of her eyes was the same as that which a mother would give in asking a physician to save the life of a dying child. She wants me to save her husband and her happiness with him, and her tears flowed because I destroyed the hope she had entertained that such a thing was possible. Her evident eagerness to hear me talk and advise her was not because she felt any interest in me, but for the reason that I as a lawyer was her last resort, but,” and again his feelings changed ; “ she took my hand, and asked to come again to-morrow. Her look ? gratitude and self-interest, I suppose.

So now, Mr. Ambrose Pierce, the wife of another man is not in love with you as the husband of another woman, and you are not in love for the first time at the age of forty-three."

He smiled grimly as he thus finished an analysis of his client's feelings and his own, but try as he would he could not banish from his mind the memory of his fair client, and a feeling of trouble and unrest took possession of his heart which was not dispelled when he left the car and faced the winter gale to walk to his home.

Ambrose and his wife lived in a suite of rooms on the fourth floor of a modest up-town hotel known as "The Portland." The hotel was owned by Mrs. Weedahl, a Hebrew lady, whom Mrs. Caldwell had mentioned in her letter to Ambrose. Mrs. Weedahl was not only the sole owner of the Portland, as well as much other valuable real estate, but the management of the hotel was to a great extent under her personal supervision. She lived there and Ambrose as her attorney was favored in the matter of terms in partial return for the legal services he rendered her. These services were the most objectionable of all his work as a lawyer, but as we have before intimated he was not in a position to choose his clients or his work. This brief reference to Mrs. Weedahl will scarcely be considered a digression, when, in considering a more important phase of our narrative we must leave this lady and her peculiar characteristics to form the subject of another chapter.

Ambrose on his arrival home went to the office and was given some mail by the young man in charge. His wife had been absent from home for

several days, visiting relatives in the country, and Ambrose as he opened a letter and looked it over inquired if his wife had returned.

"Not yet, sir," said the young man. "At least I have not seen her."

"I hardly look for her in such a storm," said Ambrose, as he stepped in the elevator and went to his apartments. He had scarcely finished dressing for dinner, when his wife entered the room, and who after greeting him with a kiss, in a few minutes was ready to go with him to the dining-room.

Ambrose in his home life was as a rule meditative and morose, and his wife had grown accustomed to his silence, but after her absence of several days, she felt that his conduct at dinner that evening was marked by a gloomy silence that caused her some anxiety.

"Are you not well, dear?" said she.

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly," he said.

"You look unusually worried and tired," said his wife; "has anything unfortunate happened?"

"Nothing, whatever," said he; "the usual worry, nothing more," and a slight smile appeared on his face.

On returning to their apartments his wife seating herself on his knee put her arms about his neck and said, "Are you glad to see me, dear?"

"Why, yes, certainly. I inquired about you as soon as I came in."

"Do you love me?"

"Why, yes, certainly. What a question. Whom do you suppose I love if not you?"

"Well then kiss me."

Ambrose did so, and as he began looking at the

evening paper which he held in one hand, his wife with a sigh went to another chair, and taking a book to read abandoned her attempt to converse with him, and they thus spent the evening in silent companionship.

It is deemed essential to the reader's proper appreciation and intelligent understanding of this narrative, also as a matter of equity and justice to the chief characters of the story that a fair and impartial analysis should here be made of the marital relations of our hero and his wife; not with any intention to excuse him or to condemn her but that the reader's clear conception of the matter may thus qualify him as a just and impartial judge.

Some people spend single lives looking for the ideal man or woman, many other people get married and look for their ideals afterward. Which is the best way, or whether the task is worth the bother under any circumstances, is a problem which the author prefers to leave to the intelligent reader. One thing is certain; the degree of persistency and thoroughness with which men and women engage in such a quest, measures their peace of mind, and also the amount of trouble they cause for themselves and others. If we were asked to say in which of the foregoing categories our hero should be included we might classify him among those who look for ideals after marriage. But as we have before intimated in our first reference to his wife, it was not his intention before marriage to consider the question of ideals at all. He wasn't exactly "buying a horse," but common sense business considerations were about the only impulses that inspired his courtship and influenced his decision to marry.

To the very many cases of married misery in this world may doubtless be attributed the popularity of the concluding lines of "Maud Muller."

"For all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, it might have been."

And there are times in the lives of some married people when the commandment,—

"Thou shalt not covet, etc.," is not only the hardest to observe, but where its violation in thought is also the most pardonable.

The wedded life of our hero and his wife furnished a pointed illustration of this, and the merit due to each is a matter which we again submit to the intelligent reader.

Both Ambrose and his wife were self-willed and obstinate, but while he was naturally careless and good-natured, and by reason of the motives that inspired his marriage, more or less neglectful in those attentions that a loving husband pays to his wife he always did the best he could in his care of her moral and physical welfare. His wife was by nature, irritable, petulant and fault-finding. The most trifling faults of Ambrose in the way of omission or commission were never passed over in silence, but were invariably made the excuse for a tirade of abuse from a tongue that was never bridled. In spite of these faults, however, which were the natural attributes of her birth and training, as were the faults of her husband; in matters of carelessness and neglect, she was absolutely an honest woman, faithful and loyal to her husband at all times, and at heart was a loving and true wife. Frequent and bitter quarrels marked the first five years

of their wedded life, chiefly because Ambrose would not assume the virtue of love which he did not possess. These quarrels were sometimes violent and when Ambrose was goaded to uncontrollable anger he would hurl to the floor a vase or a pitcher which generally ended the quarrel, and the usefulness of the china at one and the same time. Under such conditions and where both felt the obligations of honor and fidelity to their marriage vows, there could be but one sequence. Ambrose had often told his wife that no flower could grow and bloom where frosts and sunshine daily alternated, and at last his estrangement from her seemed to be complete and hopeless. With what little inherent goodness he possessed he loved her, and by reason of her virtue and loyalty for him he should have loved her more, but with a dual nature so evenly balanced upon questions of good or evil that his adaptability to respond superficially and instantaneously in either direction when he sought to accomplish an object, rendered him incapable of responding to the high standard of morality that the unquestioned purity and virtue of his wife relentlessly demanded. This perfection of the powers for good or evil that marked the character of Ambrose, one born, the other bred, enhanced in the fullest sense his quick and almost infallible perception of right and wrong, but it had made of him, ever an actor on the stage of life, and he could not consistently be anything else. His helplessness in this respect was intensified by the constant resentment he felt for the insults to which his wife daily subjected him. He was constantly made to feel that his self-respect and his manhood as well were, in his wife's estimation,

perpetually on the rack of impeachment, and so, as he felt that he had "made his bed and must lie in it," he philosophically concluded that he might have made a worse one and resolved to be as good a husband as conditions would permit.

Thus spending their lives as man and wife in name only, the only avenues of escape seemed to be divorce or death.

As the years rolled by the wife seemed to realize that she was in some degree at fault, and the respect she felt for her husband's constancy brought a marked change in her conduct toward him. She became more polite and considerate toward him, and their home life was much more agreeable, but his alienation from her remained as hopeless as before. The devoted love she showed him in her attempts to restore him to his former self, and to make him her lover husband were pathetic indeed.

And so we thus return, in our narrative, to the time when on this stormy night in February Ambrose spent the evening with his newspaper and thoughts, and his wife in reading a book. It is also deemed essential to a proper conception of this narrative by the reader, to illustrate in some degree the more agreeable features of the home life of our hero and his wife during the few years that preceded the time that our story opens.

One evening in the corridor of the hotel Ambrose had been taken quite severely to task for his tardiness in picking up a handkerchief which his wife had dropped on the floor, and later on he had in a good-natured way made it the subject of an argument as follows:—

"My dear," said he, "do you remember the old

poem about the old lady who, to test the love of her admirer, dropped her glove in a den of fighting lions and asked him to get it for her?"

"No, I do not," said his wife, as she looked at him disdainfully.

"Well," said Ambrose, "the story is like this. In ancient times a certain king gave a public entertainment, and in the amphitheatre below a number of lions were turned loose to fight each other.

“ ‘Mid rant and roar the lions tore,
With horrid laughing jaws.
They bit, they fought,
Gave blows like beams,
A wind went with their paws.’ ”

"Now the lady we have mentioned who was accompanied by a valiant knight leaned over the den of lions and deliberately dropped her glove among them, and requested her escort to secure it. He bowed, jumped down among the lions, secured the glove and escaped unharmed. Then returning to his lady, 'He threw the glove, but not with love, straight in his lady's face,' upon which the king, who had witnessed the entire affair, clapped his hands. 'Not love,' he cried, 'but vanity sets love a task like that.'"

"Well," said his wife, "I did not see any lions around when I dropped my handkerchief."

"Very true," said Ambrose. "I didn't see any lions."

"And there was no crowd of people around for you to show off to."

"That's so," said Ambrose, "there wasn't any crowd."

"It was a handkerchief I dropped, not a glove."

"Right again," said Ambrose.

"And you are not a valiant knight by any means."

"No, I am not much of a knight," he said.

Ambrose would seldom explain when his wife failed to understand him. He would never confess to her that the degradation of his self-respect and manhood to which she had by law subjected him, was the chief reason that the flower of love had failed to bloom in his heart. He was never vain enough to tell her that when she had exercised these privileges, as his wife, to the extent of almost bursting the matrimonial ties that bound them, that he remained true to his marriage vows by reason of the very sense of honor and duty, which she had for many years so terribly impeached.

On another occasion his wife had put her arms about his neck from behind his easy-chair and said,—

"You think I am the sweetest thing on earth, don't you, dear?"

"Well," said he deliberately and with a judicial smile, "you are very near it."

"You conceited wretch," said his wife, slapping him playfully.

"But my dear," said her husband, "I am trying as usual to agree with you. You have on a number of occasions distinctly said that this exalted honor belonged to me."

One day she said to him, "If I were only a beautiful woman, you would love me more, wouldn't you, dear?"

"No," said Ambrose; "mere physical beauty in

you would not make any difference in my affections."

And he meant what he said, for while he was a great admirer of beauty in women, this feature alone was a matter of but little interest to him. In fact at a summer resort hotel on one occasion, a professional beauty who so courted notoriety that she made herself very silly and generally obnoxious by soliciting compliments on her personal appearance, and who, in a desperate effort to include him in her train of admirers had considered him grossly offensive when she provoked him to say,—

"Miss Summer, we all admit that as far as personal appearance goes you are quite pretty, but while we know that the peacock is a handsome bird his charms end there by reason of his voice and his vanity."

The one thing above all else that Ambrose required of his wife was that her conduct should be such as would give character to his life and his home in external appearances if nothing more. In every other respect he gave her perfect freedom in thought and action. Both were unwilling to have the world suspect a skeleton in their closet. He felt that this concealment of their troubles was a virtue which they both for business and social reasons should rigidly assume.

One evening Ambrose putting aside his paper said abruptly, "My dear, I want you to go and have some photographs taken."

"Why, Ambrose," said she, "you know what my photographs look like. They are simply frightful."

"Never mind how they look," said he; "go to the best photographer you can find and tell him to

do his best. I know that those you had taken last made you look as if you had a severe pain; you must smile."

"That is what I always try to do," said his wife; "but when they put the back of my head in an iron brace and tell me to look pleasant, I just go all to pieces. The last time I went there, and they told me to look pleasant and think of something agreeable, I began to think of the Persian lamb coat you had said you would try to buy me, but when the pictures were completed their appearance suggested the horrible doubts I felt about getting it."

Ambrose smiled. "Well," said he, "you must try once more. You look very well in a low-necked evening dress, and you had better dress that way. As for a pleasant subject, think of something you are sure of. Myself, for instance. Just imagine that you have got the coat and that you are looking at me with a loving smile."

"Very well," said his wife, "I will go to-morrow."

She kept her word, and when after a few weeks the photos were sent home they were certainly very fine specimens of photographic art.

"Look! Ambrose, look!" said the delighted wife when her husband came home one evening and she held up the photo for his inspection.

"Did you ever think I was as pretty as that? I had no idea that I could ever be so beautiful."

Her innocent pride amused Ambrose, and he himself was also greatly pleased. The pose was most graceful. The arrangement of her hair was artistic and her beautiful white shoulders "unadorned, were adorned the most." The smile that her husband

had asked for was evidently an honest one, and as such it so enhanced the beauty of her otherwise plain features that this heartfelt expression of her love with the assistance of photographic art had for once made her a truly beautiful woman.

“Now, dear,” she said, “I intend to have one of these photos done in ivory type and have it put in a gilt frame for you especially, and put it in your room so that when I am not present you can imagine you have a pretty wife if nothing more.”

The intelligent reader will by this time clearly understand the condition of “armed neutrality” that existed in the mind of Ambrose, and to which all of his emotions were subservient. Also it will be easy for him to understand the prolonged truce that began with the cessation of hostilities on the part of the wife, and in which without surrendering one jot of her strong personality she fruitlessly begged of him to give up his own.

CHAPTER III

MRS. WEEDAHL AND HER BUSINESS METHODS

ON the morning after Mrs. Caldwell's interview with Ambrose Mrs. Weedahl, the owner of the Hotel Portland, sat busily engaged at a desk in the rear room of her suite of apartments on the office floor. This room which opened into the kitchen of her hotel was not only her private office for the transaction of hotel business, but also, despite its obscure location, the headquarters of her very extensive financial interests. Mrs. Weedahl was a Jewess, and her age about fifty years. She was a blonde, tall, muscular and heavy, whose fat plethoric face and ruddy nose were strongly suggestive of good wine. Her head was adorned with a profusion of coarse flaxen hair, and the rough freckled skin and hard cruel expression of her face were accentuated by a pair of small reddish eyes, whose only natural expressions were those of cunning treachery, deceit and cruelty. So distinctly was she in petticoats a type of the cold-blooded "Merchant of Venice," that a business acquaintance with her carried us even further backward in ages past, and created the impression that in her personality could distinctly be traced a nineteenth century embodiment of the malice, hatred and revenge that had inspired her ancestors on the day of the Crucifixion.

It might seem superfluous to say that Mrs.

Weedahl had been a widow for many years, but she was generally known as such, and as her historian for the time being, we can only admit what we feel to be a justifiable ignorance of her matrimonial experiences, and also of the lesser light who doubtless had found oblivion at any cost, preferable to opulence as her husband.

She was known chiefly as a financier of business enterprises, both great and small, and her eccentric business methods in such matters were less surprising than the success that invariably attended them. The profit of her investments seemed to be almost her only consideration, and security was a secondary matter entirely. She was always busy, if not with her own affairs, with those of other people, and ever at work she never seemed to tire. No detail of her business escaped her careful scrutiny, and the early morning of each day was devoted to the management of her hotel. We thus find her engaged at the time our reader is introduced to her.

Her manager who was consulting her at the time was a meek voiced and affable man, whose disposition was in such sharp contrast with that of his repulsive mistress that a casual observer would wonder why a woman like Mrs. Weedahl should retain such a man in her employ, but Mrs. Weedahl like many sharp business people realized that in this especial branch of her business a foil was necessary as a medium of communication between herself and guests. She said a great deal about her guests that she would not say to them, and her imperative harshly expressed orders were conveyed to them by her manager in a courteous and diplomatic way. For

instance one day a Mrs. Brown-Jones, whose income did not permit her to enjoy a more pretentious home than the Portland, and who in sad need of some distinguishing mark to raise her above the mediocrity that her plebeian names and personal appearance suggested, insisted upon the hyphen in a vain hope that it would obtain for her a social standing which otherwise she could never hope to attain;—Mrs. Brown-Jones we were about to say, had made serious complaint because the celery served her at dinner the evening before was outside stalks instead of celery hearts, otherwise the bill of fare was one which in a down-town restaurant of similar appointments would have cost her about \$2.50 for the meal, but for which, under the weekly rate charged her, she obtained at a cost of thirty-five cents.

“Just you tell Mrs. Brown Hyphen Jones that we would like to give her celery hearts ‘A la Waldorf Hyphen Astoria,’ but that on a thirty-five cent basis we are compelled to bluff more or less at the style she wants,” said Mrs. Weedahl to her manager. The manager in conveying Mrs. Weedahl’s message to Mrs. Brown-Jones had said,—

“Mrs. Weedahl regrets very much that you did not get celery hearts as ordered, and has severely reprimanded the pantry girl. She, however, asks me to suggest to you that owing to the rates we charge it is not always possible to prevent an outside stalk of celery from being served, but that in the future we will endeavor to prevent any recurrence of this neglect in the kitchen.”

“Now,” said Mrs. Weedahl to her manager,

whose name was Mr. Grill, "what have you left over from breakfast?"

"Not very much," said he. "A plateful of bits of steak and some pieces of broiled ham."

"Grind them up and call them 'force meat croquettes à la espagnole' for lunch. Anything else?"

"Well yes, there were quite a lot of cold griddle cakes left over."

"Butter on them?"

"Well, yes, some are buttered."

"Use them as an entrée to-morrow. Call them 'French pan cakes with currant jelly.'"

"We have no currant jelly. Shall I buy a tub?"

"Buy a tub?" and the good lady's face grew apoplectic. "Buy a tub? Shades of Shylock. No, get two pounds of glucose colored with analine. A tub!—and you a hotel manager! Mr. Grill, you surprise me."

Mr. Grill's discomfiture was painful to look upon, but referring to some notes he held in his hand he said, "Mr. Jordon, the new arrival, says that last evening he and his wife waited fifteen minutes for his soup to be served to him. He said that the waiter who takes care of his table was waiting on two other guests who had come in ahead of him, and he also says he won't stand any such service."

"Did he wait fifteen minutes?"

"No, I knew he was a new guest who is trying our house, and if he likes it he will stay a year, so I took care to watch his waiter in the dining-room at the time, and by my watch he only waited three and one half minutes."

"He has not signed a lease yet?"

"No, madam."

The expression on Mrs. Weedahl's face was one that would remind us of the small boy who aimed to throw a brick at his father, and as he saw his parent approaching with a stick, held the brick behind him and smiled in a genial way.

"Tell Mr. Jordon that the waiter will be called to the private office and severely reprimanded. Also soak off one of the labels from a pint of my private Cruse and Fil's Medoc, and paste it on one of those ten cent pints of cooking zinfandel. Put it on his table for dinner this evening with the compliments of Mrs. Weedahl, and say she is awfully sorry for the annoyance he was subjected to. He will pay ninety per cent. interest on that zinfandel before his year is up, or my name isn't Rachel Weedahl;" upon saying which the honest lady's eyes shone with a baleful gleam that boded no good for Mr. Jordon.

The manager continued, "Mrs. M'Garrité says she cannot eat the luncheons we serve and wants to know if she can have poached eggs on toast without extra charge?"

"Has she signed a lease?"

"Yes, madam, for a year."

"Tell Mrs. Mack Garrity she can have anything extra that she wants if she pays for it. Tell her to take her thirty-five cents down town and see what she will get for it. A half portion of soup and a piece of bread."

And again the good lady looked warm with her righteous indignation.

"Anything more?" she inquired as she touched

an electric bell and a boy appeared in response to her summons.

"I believe that is all," said Mr. Grill, as he arose to go.

"Very well," said his mistress, and then turning toward the waiting boy she said,—

"Has Judge Pierce been down to breakfast yet?"

"He is in the dining-room now," said the boy.

"Tell him that if he has time I would like to see him before he goes out."

"Yes'm," said the boy, as he hastened to obey the order.

Mrs. Weedahl then went on opening and reading her mail, and after a few minutes Ambrose entered the office.

"Good-morning, Ambrose," said the lady. "Sit down, please. Are you in a hurry?"

"No, not at all," said he. "I have a case in court at 10:30, but I have fully an hour at my disposal if you wish it."

"Good," said his client. "There are several matters I wish to speak of. First of all, has Bloomenberg paid any rent yet?"

"No," said Ambrose. "He is now over three months in arrears. Shall I push him?"

"What good will it do?"

"He has quite a stock of dry goods."

"And I hold a bill of sale on most of it."

"For what amount?"

"Thirty thousand dollars."

Ambrose whistled softly.

"You see," said the lady, "that the only way Bloomenberg can protect himself and me is to fail. He will have to plunge a little. In addition to my

bill of sale on his stock, I want you to see him and make him give me a note equal to six months' rent with interest. Then tell him to borrow all the money he can. He can raise considerable cash in this way, for he don't owe much outside of what he owes me. He ought to make a pretty good failure and save enough to begin again."

Ambrose looked the disgust he felt, but made no reply.

"I don't see any other way to save my money," said she. "If I push him I will lose on the deal. Will you see him for me?"

"Yes," said Ambrose. "I will see him on Monday, and force him to give the note, but I think I had best send him to you for advice as to the other business. A personal understanding on these matters between you and Bloomenberg would be much better than one between Bloomenberg and me."

"Right you are, Ambrose. Your advice is always good. Get the note. Send Bloomenberg to me and let me do the rest. I believe in my heart though," said she, "that you have got too much conscience for a lawyer. Your honesty crops out so often."

"In the matter of conscience," said Ambrose, "I never knew whether I had too much or too little."

"Too much, Ambrose, entirely too much. Now I am going to finance another man in a fruit and vegetable scheme, and I want you to draw up a bill of sale covering the stock, etc., which I shall start him with. Make the bill for five hundred dollars."

"What do you know about him?"

"Very little indeed, save as to his business ability."

"Has he any money of his own?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"Who is he?"

"I only know his name."

"And yet you will advance him five hundred dollars."

"Just so."

Ambrose looked at her inquiringly.

"Yes, Ambrose," said she, "I have another protégé on hand. And he is simply a wonder. He is only a boy in years, age twenty-two, but I discovered him. He would get rich without me, but I want to use him. He is selling peas now."

"Selling peas!" said Ambrose.

"That is all, but the way he does it is what attracted my attention."

"Well?"

"Well, he buys a few quarts of dried green peas—two cents per quart; soaks 'em over night in water; then puts them in a big market basket with a cloth over them, and sells them at private houses as hot-house peas for twenty-five cents per quart. He has a tin liquid quart measure with the bottom hammered inward and the handle knocked off, so that when he measures his peas he sticks three fingers in the measure, and of course helps to fill it that way. Oh, there is no doubt about him," said she, noting the sardonic smile on Ambrose's face. "He is a Rothschild in finance, only he is still in pin feathers."

"All right," said Ambrose, laughing, "send your Rothschild to me, and I will tie him up the best I can."

"Now another thing, Ambrose," said Mrs.

Weedahl. "Have you succeeded in getting any satisfaction from Hickey & Cross, the plumbers, in regard to the repairs they made on my Queen Street house?"

"Not yet," said Ambrose. "They refused the offer you made for a settlement, and we have let the matter rest."

"Well," said she, "you had better 'phone them and see if you can make terms for a settlement. I wish to have the bill paid, as I intend to order them to do considerable work on my country place, Berylwood. Get the best terms you can, and I will send them a check. By the way, Ambrose, I intend that my opening of Berylwood in June shall be a social event that will eclipse all my previous efforts in that line. I propose to make it a stunner, Ambrose, a regular stunner."

"Your fêtes at Berylwood have always been magnificent, Mrs. Weedahl," said he.

"Yes, but this time, I intend to make the affair one that society will attend or regret for the rest of their lives if they don't; why shouldn't I, Ambrose? My house there is the finest country place for a thousand miles around; surrounded by two hundred acres of beautiful lawns and groves of lovely shade trees. I have the money to spend, and when I spend it that way I can see the effect. I think that is all for the present, Ambrose. I suppose you understand everything."

"Entirely," said he, "but there is one thing I wanted to ask you about; how did you happen to know Mrs. Caldwell? She called on me at your suggestion."

Mrs. Weedahl leaned back in her chair and

laughed loudly as she fixed her red eyes upon Ambrose in a cunning gaze.

"Mrs. Caldwell!" said she. "Did she call on you? I didn't think she would muster up courage enough to do so. Yes, I sent her to you. She has got a whole lot of trouble. I hope you took her case."

"Yes, I did," said Ambrose, "but how did you know her?"

"Oh! she used to drive out to Berylwood once in a while with her husband. You know he is the sheriff out at Raleigh; you also know that Berylwood is only a short distance from Raleigh. I saw them quite often during the summer."

"Then you know considerable about them both."

"Oh, yes, Dick Caldwell always was a hard case; a regular political boozier. He always liked bad whiskey, bad cigars and bad women, and when a man's tastes run that way he isn't good for much. I don't see how he ever got to be sheriff."

"But his wife seems a lovely woman, and a good woman."

"So she is. She is far too good for him. She is just too sweet for anything. But, beware, Ambrose, I know her too. She has got an Ocean Grove conscience, but Coney Island emotions; I also know that you are weak on charming women like her."

Ambrose was tempted to angrily resent this indelicate reference to his unfortunate client, as well as the implied estimate of him, but he realized that a reproof to a woman like Mrs. Weedahl whose character and habits were thoroughly formed would do more harm than good, and so he said nothing.

A pause in the conversation between Mrs. Weedahl and her attorney in which both seemed in deep thought was at length broken by the lady, who abruptly began,

“Ambrose, how long has it been since you saw or heard from your sister? Pardon my mentioning this subject, for I know it is distasteful to you, but I have always felt a woman’s curiosity about your only living relative.”

“Why, Mrs. Weedahl,” said he, “you know some of the facts concerning her. The last time I saw her was when she lived in this city, nearly ten years ago. She was then a girl of twenty and absolutely incorrigible. You know I disowned her. The last time I heard from her was when a man told me a year or so after this that she had married some man and shortly after ran away and left him. I don’t know the man’s name, but why do you ask about her?”

“Oh, no reason whatever; simply my everlasting curiosity to find out all I can.”

Ambrose was hardly satisfied with this answer, for he had a faint impression that Mrs. Weedahl’s abrupt inquiry in regard to his sister, was not, as she had said, made from idle curiosity alone, but he made no further comment, and hastily consulting his watch hurried down town to his office.

CHAPTER IV

A FRIEND IN NEED

ON arriving at his office, Ambrose found the laconic and imperturbable Adolph awaiting him.

"Mr. Morse 'phoned me an hour ago that his client, Mrs. Jeffries, in the case of Jeffries versus Hartman, was too ill to attend court this morning, and so he has secured a postponement of the case for one week, and hopes that this will be agreeable to you."

"Very well," said Ambrose, as he removed his hat and coat; "note the postponement, hour, etc., in my engagements for next week, and file my arguments you have completed there along with the papers in the case."

"Mrs. Caldwell also 'phoned a few minutes ago, and asked if you would please call her up as soon as you came in. This is her 'phone number," and he handed Ambrose a slip of paper.

"Did she say anything else?" said Ambrose.

"She asked if I thought you would be here before eleven o'clock."

"For the reason that a train leaves for Raleigh at 11:15," said Ambrose.

"I told her that you would be here before ten o'clock, and that I would deliver her message as soon as you came in."

"Was that all?"

"She said she had a communication to make to you which she thought would be of considerable importance in her case. Shall I get her on the 'phone for you now?"

"No," said Ambrose, "not yet. I want to sit down and think over the matter a moment."

He seated himself at his desk, and remained there for some time absorbed in deep thought. He quickly decided upon a consistent line of action with reference to Mrs. Caldwell, and then his thoughts reverted more intently to the question Mrs. Weedahl had asked him in regard to his sister. He pondered deeply over the matter, but could only attribute her inquiry to a depraved and morbid taste for topics of sensational gossip, or to a disposition which she frequently showed toward him of trying to drag him down to her own moral level by exhibiting a coarse familiarity in her references to his misfortunes in business, as well as to his only living relative, the mention of whose name ever filled him with a sense of the keenest sorrow and shame; for Ambrose had loved his sister. He remembered how when a boy of fifteen he had played with her as a child in the fields adjoining the old homestead; how he had carried her on his shoulders, while she screamed in childish glee at the antics of the dog who romped at her brother's feet. He remembered how he had patiently nursed her once when she was sick with fever; how at her request he had placed her numerous dolls in the crib, all in a row, where she could touch them, and how her little pale face had lighted up with a smile as she reached out her little hands to him. The old home, his happy childhood days, the sorrow he felt at the death of

his father and mother, his separation from his sister, her wayward life and final disgrace as an out-cast from society ; his sense of utter loneliness and unhappiness as he thought how he had struggled against a relentless fate. These thoughts as they came like a flood into the mind of Ambrose, carrying him backward to the past, created a feeling of dejection and despair, from which he aroused himself only by a determined effort.

"Poor little Ruth," he said with a deep sigh, "you were all I had left and I loved you so."

Ambrose determined that at his first opportunity he would satisfy himself upon the subject of Mrs. Weedahl's curiosity in asking him about his sister, and then rising from his desk he referred to the 'phone number that Mrs. Caldwell had given and asked for the connection of Raleigh.

"Yes," said he, "I have decided to come out on the 11:15 train this morning."

"Why, yes, I can see you, but perhaps it would not be advisable to call at your house. The absence of the sheriff from home would facilitate an interview, but I think best to see you only for a few minutes. I will bring Adolph with me and would suggest that you walk down to the depot about the time our train is due."

"Adolph," said Ambrose, as he hung up the 'phone, "I want you to go to Raleigh with me. Our train will leave in twelve minutes."

Adolph looked the surprise he felt, as he closed his desk preparatory to obeying his master's order, but fleeting as was the expression on his face indicative of this feeling, it did not escape the observation of his master, who was so accustomed to

the sphynx-like reserve of his clerk, that any visible evidence of emotion by him was always accepted as a caution to carefully consider any plan of action he might have in view. He felt that his clerk's silent admonition was not uncalled for, and smiled as he thought of his penetrating sagacity, but knowing in his own heart that Adolph was mistaken in his hypothesis, he felt that an assurance of intended discretion was due to his faithful clerk; so with an indulgent smile he said:—

“We shall make no mistake in going to Raleigh, Adolph. You do not understand everything. Our stay there will be very brief, and our business possibly of little moment so far as Mrs. Caldwell's case is concerned.”

Ambrose was secretly entertaining in his mind a suspicion that had been awakened by a remark that Mrs. Caldwell had just made over the 'phone, which in connection with her description of her husband's mistress and the inquiry that Mrs. Weedahl had made caused him to feel interested in the identity of his client's rival.

“Nonsense,” he said to himself; “the suspicion is simply absurd, but I shall feel better for knowing,” and with this secret thought uppermost in his mind he walked in company with Adolph to the depot.

In less than an hour they arrived at Raleigh, and as they stepped upon the platform they found Mrs. Caldwell awaiting them.

As Ambrose raised his hat with one hand and extended the other in greeting, her glad smile of welcome, sincere and honest as it was, caused him again to forget all else save her charming manners and appearance. Every outline of her graceful

form was set off to the best advantage by a street costume in which simplicity of design emphasized the beauty it was intended to adorn.

"It was so good of you to come here to-day," said she in a voice whose soft low tones were rendered inexpressibly sweet by the heartfelt sincerity that prompted her words. "Where shall we go to talk?"

"The ladies' waiting-room right here will perhaps be best," said Ambrose. "It is likely to be vacant just now."

And so it was. They entered and seating themselves where they would not be observed by the ticket agent, they felt free to discuss as quickly as limited time would permit, the objects of their meeting.

"First," said Ambrose, "tell me all you know about this woman; who is she?"

"Her name is Adele Moran. She lives with a woman said to be her aunt out near Mrs. Weedahl's place, Berylwood. I never heard of her until a few months ago. One day while looking over my husband's desk during his absence from town I found several letters and a photograph, which I believe to be his most recent conquest. I have the photo with me and will show it to you, though I don't think it resembles her very much."

She opened a hand-bag she carried, and drew therefrom a photograph of a woman's face in profile and gave it to Ambrose, who took it to a window and studied it intently for several minutes. Presently he returned it to her, remarking quietly as he did so:

"The face is a strange one to me. I never saw

her before ;” and then he continued, “ you told me your husband was absent from home this morning. Do you know where he is ? ”

“ No, I do not. He went off alone driving. I suppose he has gone out to take Adele for a ride.”

“ Well, perhaps we may see them before we return home. I shall attend to several matters in your interest while here. We must have evidence. Your personal statements unsupported by the testimony of competent witnesses will not win your case in court. I practice here occasionally, and will place your affairs in the hands of a man who will, I have no doubt, easily secure the evidence you need. I know this man personally. He is reliable and I am sure he will work for a contingent fee. I shall also go to the county clerk’s office and secure positive information regarding your husband’s property, and in fact, will fully satisfy myself as to his resources. I think in a week or so we should be in a position to push the case in court.”

“ And I am to call at your office to-morrow afternoon,” said she.

“ Yes,” said Ambrose, “ and now, for your sake, I think our interview should, for the present, terminate here. Remember what I told you yesterday. Innocent as you are, you cannot afford to have your own conduct subjected to question. I will go from here with Adolph to the Raleigh House for dinner. Leave us here and go by another route to your home.”

“ Very well,” said his client, “ there is only one thing more I have to say now. I wanted you to see the photograph and also wanted to tell you that I have heard that they dine quite frequently at the

Raleigh House. Does the sheriff know you when he sees you? "

Ambrose smiled. "Yes," said he. "I see you have anticipated me. The sheriff knows me, but he does not know Adolph. Adolph will act upon a few suggestions I made to him coming here on the train. Of course, as your attorney, I must keep in the background, and as he knows me it would be useless for me to do anything else."

"I fully understand," said his client, smiling. "I see that you need no suggestions from me, but let me caution you in one respect. The clerk at the Raleigh House, I am quite sure, has an understanding with the sheriff."

"I had fully considered that possibility," said Ambrose, quietly.

"I wish I could leave him now. I am often in fear of my life when he has been drinking."

"You shall leave him very soon, but you must not let him say that you wilfully deserted him."

"Very well, I leave it all in your hands; good-bye. I will see you to-morrow," and grasping his hand warmly, she hurried away.

Ambrose found Adolph awaiting him in the smoking-room and said, "Now Adolph, you and I will also separate here. Go in advance of me to the Raleigh House, where I will meet you later. It is now 12:30, and we will dine there at different tables. You of course do not know me. You know what to do if the party arrives in advance of me, and perhaps they may not arrive at all. I am going first to the county clerk's office and may also see Bob Wrenn before or after dinner."

With this understanding they left each other.

Ambrose was detained at the county clerk's office rather longer than he had anticipated, and it was past 1 : 30 when he reached the hotel. He had fully satisfied himself in regard to the sheriff's resources and looked around for Adolph, as he entered the hotel exchange.

Adolph saw him and his face was as expressionless as a blank wall, but he arose from his seat and walking down the corridor entered a retiring room. Ambrose followed. When alone together, Adolph said, "They are dining together in a private room on the second floor. I went up in the elevator with them and left it when they did. I watched for the bell-boy who opened the room for them. I gave the boy a dollar and secured a key which admitted me to the room adjoining. I saw and heard enough to make me a competent witness. In fact," said Adolph, as the trace of a smile appeared on his face, "no other testimony but mine will be needed."

"Good," said Ambrose, "we will conclude our programme as previously arranged. We will now take dinner and meet again at the depot for the four o'clock train. We might return sooner, but for fear that he will suspect us and arrange a transfer of his property, I will see that a writ is prepared and served upon him to-morrow morning. I fear trouble for his wife, but she should not leave him until we can get the writ served."

Ambrose lost no time in attending to the necessary formalities in bringing an action for divorce against the sheriff, and shortly afterward he rejoined Adolph at the depot where together they took a train and returned to the city. On the train Adolph

related in detail his experiences as an amateur detective at the Raleigh House, and told how a cracked panel in the door communicating with the room in which the sheriff and his companion were dining had enabled him to secure the evidence he sought.

"I think," said Ambrose, "that when we reach the city I will telephone Mrs. Caldwell, if I can reach her, to look out for trouble, and to be prepared to leave as soon as Bob Wrenn serves the writ on her husband."

Later on he succeeded in doing this and was advised that the sheriff had not yet returned.

On the following morning when Ambrose arrived at his office he found Adolph awaiting him in the hallway leading to the same.

"The bell-boy made another dollar in addition to the one I gave him," said he.

"What do you mean?" said Ambrose.

"He told the sheriff that a man had been watching him in the adjoining room."

"Indeed," said Ambrose with an air of perplexity. "I suppose that means Mrs. Caldwell is here?"

"She is in your office now with her servant girl. I thought best not to let you be surprised by this."

"You are discretion personified, Adolph," said Ambrose. "Go in. I will be there in a few minutes," and he walked to the end of the hall in order to briefly consider these rapidly moving events that his action of the day before had precipitated.

"Now," thought Ambrose, "this means that I am expected to suggest a place for her to live as well as to advise her upon other matters of equal importance. Well I think I have anticipated every-

thing ; there is nothing in this, but what I fully expected. My duty is plain, and I most certainly feel no inclination to avoid it."

He then entered his office and kindly greeted Mrs. Caldwell and her maid who awaited him.

With tearful eyes Mrs. Caldwell raised her veil and showed him a dark bruise on her forehead.

"He struck me, judge," she said. "He came home just before dark. He had been drinking and was in a terrible rage. He accused me of employing a detective and said the bell-boy had told him that a man had been watching in an adjoining room. He cursed me terribly, and when I attempted to speak he struck me with his open hand, but so hard that I fell to the sofa, almost insensible."

"Did any one see him strike you?"

"Indade, I saw him, sor," said the maid. "It was a hard blow that he gave,—the miserable villain. I told him that I would never stay another hour in a house with the likes of him, and that I would leave with the missus. He went off to the saloon while I packed my own trunk and helped the missus to pack hers."

"And then," said Mrs. Caldwell, "we had a man take our trunks to the depot. We stayed over night at the hotel, and came to the city this morning."

"Yes," said Ambrose, and then turning to the maid he said, "are you willing to swear to what you saw?"

"Indade I am, sor," said the girl. "I could swear right now."

"Very well," said Ambrose, "you can swear right now ; the sooner the better. Adolph, take her into

your room, prepare her affidavit, and get notary Stubbs, next door to acknowledge it as soon as you are ready. Now," said he, as Adolph and the maid went to the adjoining room, "what would you wish to do in the matter of securing a place of abode?"

"Indeed," said his client, looking at him helplessly. "I have neither wishes nor choice. I have no means, whatever," and again the unbidden tears came to her eyes.

"I see," said Ambrose, thoughtfully, "you have done the best you could, and in your action of leaving home, no other course was open to you. But do not despair, Mrs. Caldwell. Your case is one in which the law is certain to amply provide for you. Your husband's resources, as I learned yesterday, will exceed eighty thousand dollars, clear of all encumbrances. Prior to obtaining your decree of divorce I do not think it advisable for you to reside at Raleigh. The sheriff has too many friends there, and we must very carefully guard against counter charges by him, if he makes a defense, and I do not think he will attempt to make one. I live up town at the Portland; how would it suit you to go there?"

"Oh, I would gladly go there," said she eagerly, "but how would it be possible, in view of my circumstances? It may be a long time before I can get money."

"It won't be long," said Ambrose. "Bob Wrenn has perhaps already served a writ on your husband which I ordered yesterday," and then he smiled as he thought of a business proposition he would make to Mrs. Weedahl, and which would be strictly in

line with those she was as a rule so willing to consider.

"I think," he continued, "that Mrs. Weedahl would be glad to take you at the Portland, as a guest and await your convenience in the matter of paying your bills, also I can secure for you a loan of sufficient money to meet your necessary expenses in other ways. Perhaps the manager of the Portland can give employment to your maid also. She seems like a good girl, and worthy employees are always in demand at a hotel. I hardly see what else you can do, as some provision must be made for you at once, even though the arrangements are but temporary. Please wait here while I attend to some other matters that demand my attention, and at noon I will go with you to the Portland."

"Thank you," said his client. "I feel that I can never repay you for your kindness," and her look of gratitude and relief were more expressive than her words.

Ambrose looked at his client with an expression equally sincere and said, "Mrs. Caldwell, aside from all questions of business appertaining to our present relations, I should be recreant to every sense of manhood as well as humanity if in your present troubles I failed to render you as much aid as I could consistently give, so I assure you that this assistance is no task to me, for the friendly interest I feel in you renders it impossible for me to consider the trifling favors I have shown you as such, and now," said he, smiling pleasantly, "I must leave you for an hour or so, and will return as soon as possible."

Upon returning he notified Adolph that he was

going home and would not be at his office again that day, and with his client and her maid started at once for the Portland. Mrs. Caldwell who by this time had recovered her cheerfulness in some degree, remarked with a smile as they rode along:—

“My maid has informed me that the sheriff already has a rival for the affections of Adele.”

“Indeed,” said Ambrose smiling, “it is strange, very strange, how men at times pursue a woman. We might often feel justified in assuming from this that the real, authentic and original ‘bone of contention’ was the rib from which she was made.”

“And she has also boasted of her influence on the sheriff, that she might add to my humiliation.”

“Then,” said Ambrose, “her reign will be short-lived; a woman’s influence over a man ends as soon as she begins to brag about it.”

On arriving at the Portland, Ambrose registered for Mrs. Caldwell and her maid, and they were shown to suitable rooms. He then asked to see Mrs. Weedahl and was shown at once to her private parlor. This lady greeted him with a rather affectionate familiarity, which Ambrose at once attributed to the genial influence of a copious and recent indulgence in wine.

“Glad to see you, Ambrose,” said she; “sit down and be comfortable. You want to see me?”

“Yes,” said he. “Mrs. Caldwell and her maid have just arrived and are now guests of the Portland.”

Mrs. Weedahl leaned forward in astonishment.

“Well, Ambrose,” said she, “the way you break news to me sometimes takes my breath. When did this happen?”

"Just a few minutes ago," said he. "I brought her here. Her husband struck her most cruelly last night and she fled from him for her life."

"Is it possible, Ambrose, well! well! and the sheriff did that. Oh, my! oh, my! a man is pretty low when he forgets that people who wear skirts are women, and that people who wear pants are supposed to be men."

Ambrose then related in detail his client's financial circumstances. The evidence he had secured at the Raleigh House, the sheriff's resources, and how he had already begun suit for a decree of divorce with alimony, and that in his judgment as a lawyer, Mrs. Weedahl would take little risk in giving to his client the credit she desired.

"Why certainly, Ambrose," said Mrs. Weedahl, "give her the best in the house. She will get enough of the sheriff's \$80,000 to pay for it. It won't make any difference when she pays. When you say you can win a case that's enough, and I know what it means. Give her a fine suite of rooms; tell her she can have as much money as she wants. She won't mind a little extra interest, I suppose, on account of the risk, you know."

"Now, Mrs. Weedahl," said Ambrose, "that is a point upon which I want you to do me a favor. I don't want Mrs. Caldwell to be taken advantage of in her present helpless condition. A modest suite of rooms will do for her, and I ask you most earnestly not to charge her more than legal interest for any money you advance her. If your manager can employ her maid, I hope he will do so; if not, she can secure a place elsewhere."

"All right, Ambrose, this shall be as you say, so don't worry about it. Have a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you," said he, "and now, one thing more; Mrs. Caldwell is a lady of most exquisite sensibilities, and will doubtless keenly feel the delicacy of her position here in a public hotel, as a woman who is estranged from her husband and involved in a suit for divorce. I hope that these facts will not become a subject for gossip among the guests. She of course is not to blame for her unfortunate circumstances, and it is not fitting that she should be called upon to explain to any one. I hope that her present troubles will not be added to by the morbid curiosity of other guests."

"Don't let that worry you, Ambrose. We won't allow any investigation of her affairs, and there is nothing wrong about her personally. There are only two kinds of women who won't bear investigation, Ambrose, only two kinds."

"Mention them," said Ambrose with smiling curiosity.

The expression on Mrs. Weedahl's face was that of a woman who unwillingly betrays her sex as she answered:—

"One of them is the woman who advertises for an elderly gent to loan her ten dollars;—object matrimony."

"And the other," said Ambrose, and this time he laughed heartily.

"The other is the woman who poses as a professional beauty,—bah!" and the worldly wise lady's expression of contempt was for once so genuine that it indicated even in her liberal mind a limit of toleration for her sex.

When Ambrose retired that night he smiled as he thought of all that had happened during the past forty-eight hours, and went to sleep, wondering how it would end.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR REFUSES TO ADMIT THAT
"THE CLOUD LOOKS LIKE A WHALE" AS A
MATTER OF DEFERENCE TO MY LORD PUBLIC
OPINION

UPON the subject of marriage and divorce and the social status of divorced people the writer of this narrative does not intend to evade his responsibility as an humble advocate of consistent morality, either by a tacit concurrence with the generally accepted views of the world at large, or by an evasion of their vital features for the sake of being decorous. Much has been said and written in assurance of the moral betterment of this world and a contention that this generally accepted hypothesis is not a tenable one seems a task too great for any one individual to assume, but, the wish that ideal theories were facts is father to the conviction that they are not. The Adam and Eve of to-day are but duplicates of their historic ancestors. Men are not only animals, but they are the worst of all animals, for they kill each other more than other animals do, and upon the question of morals as regards the matter of sex there is perhaps less crime committed by the savages who don't wear clothes than there is by the savages who do. This pessimistic but matter-of-fact view of the world's progress in civilization so far as the question of

original sin is concerned, would seem to be the necessary and rational basis for providing an argument against some of the fallacious ideas that regulate the questions of marriage and divorce to-day.

The animal nature of man is a thing that must be whipped into shape, either by law or circumstances, and it is chiefly upon this assumption that we would base our criticism of some of the social evils resulting from love-blinded ideas as to marriage. Marriage is the most important factor of Christian civilization, but its practical, worldly and legal features are almost entirely obscured by its contemplation as an ideal form of existence. This sadly delusive conception of its real meaning applies to so many unfortunate marriages that it would seem to be the essence of common sense to reverse the usual order of things and make it strictly a contract of law to the exclusion of every other consideration. In a marriage ceremony it would be better to eliminate entirely the church, the altar, the clergyman and the wedding-march. These are the features that are looked forward to by young people as the portals of ideal existence in wedlock. The character of the obligations they thus assume creates the impression that their responsibilities are chiefly to God, and while we admit the figurative merit of this, its literal value is refuted by the well-known fact that in observing these obligations the world at large is like a school-room full of children when the teacher is absent.

Also, by church marriages, the erroneous impression is created that if people find their obligations to God a source of unhappiness to them, the laws of man provide an easy avenue of escape.

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People contemplating marriage should be made to realize prior to the ceremony that there is much law to bind them together and little or none to part them. The misleading, supposedly ideal features of church marriages are so far reaching in injurious effects that it would appear perfectly proper to substitute for them a form of ceremony so shorn of its ideal features that a magistrate's office with six policemen in full uniform and drawn clubs, with a patrol wagon for a conveyance, should be regarded as the gateway to whatever bliss the condition of wedlock was expected to afford.

This seemingly harsh reversal of an established custom, iconoclastic as it may appear, would materially help to remove its misleading ideality and intensify its very serious realism. In many marriages the awakening from dreamland is rude enough under any conditions and to emphasize this, is not only a species of cruelty, but its tendency is to narrow the influence of the church and to extend that of the divorce court, and so we further claim that the influence of clergymen in these matters should be to simply enforce and sustain the laws of the land, and not to inculcate impressions that these laws may be evaded by the assumption of higher, but less binding obligations of the church.

It is no answer to my criticism for the church to say that its marriage ceremonies are recognized as lawful by the courts of our country. We are not questioning the legality, but the appearance and effect. Custom is a very strict law for many.

The church marriage is for the young and innocent a hook covered with a tempting bait, a trap for the love-blind and unwary, whose sharp teeth are

concealed by palms and flowers, or else the rocks upon which the bark of life is often wrecked, and whose song of the siren is the music of the wedding march.

Marriage is the severest test of business honor to which mankind is ever subjected, and as the foregoing opinions are the honest convictions of the writer, admittedly a sinner, surely the clergy of our country cannot afford to be less conscientious than he. I would not for a moment convey the impression that a condition of wedlock is not improved by the moralizing influence of the church. I would only assume that the church is more needful after marriage than before; that its sacred usefulness would be more greatly enhanced by providing the antidote instead of the bane. Its business methods should be so reversed that instead of the church creating victims for the divorce court the divorce court should send its victims to the church. Let us be just, for *Justice*, which in one word is a summary of all the religion that God through nature or the Bible has ever sought to teach humanity, should be the only motive to inspire or regulate the laws of marriage in their application to the welfare of society.

After marriage, and when the contracting parties imagine that they have made a serious mistake, just the same as they imagined before marriage, that they could not live without each other, the question will often arise as to how much suffering they should endure before seeking relief in divorce. I answer almost everything, and sometimes even death itself. The mere question of incompatibility should never be considered a satisfactory excuse for divorce. No

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man and wife ever lived who could live together without agreeing to disagree. As to how much suffering should be endured is a question that has been answered many thousands of times, but in different ways. In the minds of some people a single act of infidelity is enough to separate them. In the minds of others constant infidelity by one or both is mutually forgiven. Some women feel that a single blow is enough to break the bond, while some women permit their husbands to beat them every day and still remain faithful to their marriage vows. The degree of credit to be accorded these people is to be measured by their mental calibre and native refinement.

But there are conditions of married life where divorce is not only justifiable but commendable. There is no question but that some people do make serious mistakes in getting married. Some people should never marry, but they do not know this. "To err is human," and in marrying they may have made the most innocent, and yet the most serious mistake of their lives. They married in obedience to the mandates of virtue and respectability, and perhaps for one or both the divorce court is the last resort in which honor and self-respect can be saved, and so if from the secure judgment-seat of married bliss we condemn them to social exile for thus seeking to end their misery by law, we certainly commit the worst of social crimes, and upon the question of true honor we sink ourselves far beneath those whom we thus condemn.

The writer once attended the marriage of a woman who had been divorced. This marriage-ceremony was performed by a prominent Episcopal

divine, and it was interesting to note the fact that the clergyman omitted the customary words, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." We submit this statement without further comment than to suggest that the reader draw his own inferences from it in connection with the opinions already expressed.

One of the chief causes of married misery lies in the fact that the love that inspires marriage is so often falsely interpreted. It is often supposed to be a mental emotion when in reality it is a physical one; both forms are engendered by natural laws, but it would appear to be a reasonable deduction to say that the emotion inspired by congenial tastes, loyalty to mutual interests, long association, mutual kindness and respect is the only kind of love that is worthy of the name. We cannot deny the dual nature of love, or that all of its phases are engendered by natural laws, but experience, that high-priced teacher, who in these matters so frequently leads us to the divorce court, or else abandons us to a life of misery, is forever teaching the lesson that prior to marriage we do not possess sufficient intelligence to distinguish the difference between these two emotions, and the state of wedlock forces the question to an issue and a solution. This solution sometimes is a very bitter one, for in women far more than in men is to be found the highest degree of virtue, or the lowest depth of depravity. A good pure woman is the nearest thing to God, but a thoroughly bad woman is the nearest thing to the devil.

Every courtship is unfortunately full of deceptions, but they usually end with the wedding break-

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fast, and when the honeymoon is over many unhappy married people might get along better if they would properly introduce themselves to each other.

In the case of the young man before marriage it is not always an easy matter to form a proper estimate of him. He is in most cases the lottery ; a responsibility which he recognizes as a harness and from which he cannot break away is often necessary to develop him as a man. In the case of the woman it is an easier matter. She is of course always an angel if Cupid is blind, but a careful study of her intimate female friends will tell enough. They are the unconscious mirrors in which her real self is reflected.

There is also something in a breed, for when a rabbit weds the turtle, mediocrity in speed, at least, is reasonably assured.

We do not purpose to tax the patience of the reader by making this chapter on marriage a guide to matrimony, and will end it with one more suggestion. It is true that "the mate for beauty should be a man," but there are few indeed who awake to realize a great law of nature in the fact that "when the queen bee weds she flies so high that only the stalwarts of her hive can follow her."

CHAPTER VI

PLAYING WITH FIRE

THE advent of Annette (for so we shall for good and sufficient reasons, hereafter, refer to the unfortunate client of our hero), into the social circle at the Portland, was marked by the usual features that attend the efforts of a handsome woman alone, and apparently without friends to live in an honest and respectable way. Her beauty, her graceful repose and charming manners were at once the subject of question and jealous curiosity on the part of the women, and a mad rush to form her acquaintance was made by both the married and single men. The precautions taken by Mrs. Weedahl and Ambrose to protect her and to preserve her peace of mind were fruitless. Her poor little secret soon leaked out and it became quickly noised through the house that she was a woman who had left her husband and was suing for divorce. She thus became the object of tender but questionable commiseration on the part of the men, but the openly expressed sympathy they showed for her only added fuel to the flame of jealous resentment, which was apparent at all times in the treatment she was accorded by the lady guests of the hotel. The fact that she quietly ignored the attentions of the men as well as the morbid curiosity of the women, marked her among the gossips as a deep schemer,

who would stand any amount of watching. If she came down to dinner in a plain unassuming dress they wondered if she had no better clothes. If she added to her natural beauty by appearing in a gown that was elegant in design and appearance the "bold woman was working for the admiration of the men." If she did not go out in the evening they wondered whom she was staying home to entertain. If she did go out during the evening for any purpose, whatever, they assembled in the office waiting-rooms to watch for her when she came in, and to note if any escort accompanied her to the door, and if by such sharp surveillance and brazen impoliteness they caused her face to color with embarrassment, they chuckled audibly among themselves in a feeling of triumph at the thought that they had penetrated her guise of morality, and exposed her on general principles, if nothing more. Is it not thus that a woman's injustice and cruelty to her sex is often responsible for a sister's downfall? and that the vice she thus creates becomes a Nemesis to wreck her own happiness or home? Many women who live in hotels are the most bitter foes of defenseless creatures of their sex, chiefly because they do not possess sufficient energy, intelligence, fair-mindedness or tact to manage a home of their own. Thus nursed in indolence they become criminal in mind. This mode of life intensifies their uselessness, and if Satan does not find mischief for their idle hands in one way he does in another.

In every hotel there is the usual clique of gossiping women, and as the reader has already inferred the Portland was no exception to this rule.

Mrs. Brown-Jones who by the way was a "sod" widow, was a recognized leader of this coterie of scandal-mongers. Mrs. Brown-Jones, we should say, was preeminently qualified in many ways for this distinguished social position. She was fat, oily and of imposing stature. Her words as well as her feet carried weight. The women listened to her because they were afraid to do otherwise, and in addition to all this she possessed the ability to talk to the utter exclusion of everybody else. Mrs. Brown-Jones often spoke of her deceased husband and gained considerable sympathy by the manner in which she referred to his death, and the many years of ill health which he suffered prior to his departure for a better world, but a careful observer who had been advised as to certain facts relative to her past, would never fail to note that she never referred to the life she had led previous to her marriage, or to the fact that she had actually caused her husband's death by setting a social pace for him that his impaired health and financial ability could not possibly endure. In her own heart she of course knew that she had literally worried him to death, but at the mature age of fifty years or more with no other object in view, of course, than the moral betterment of humanity, she had resolved to be very good, and at the time we write she was very active in church work, while her prominence in such matters was duly attested by the fact that her name was frequently seen on printed notices of church events, which were conspicuously posted around the office of the Portland, and the man who did the church printing had never been known to omit the hyphen. Under such conditions the mor-

tal who might possess sufficient temerity to openly delve among the records of her past would have been literally frowned out of the house. Mrs. Brown-Jones had no time for an immoral woman. Immorality to her was something terrible. She frowned upon it so often and so openly that her paraded purity was strongly suggestive of Mrs. Micawber's devotion to her husband, the beautiful pathos of which has been immortalized by Dickens in his story of "David Copperfield." We might mention right here that the vulgar Mrs. Weedahl had remarked one morning to Mr. Grill when he had shown her some immense church posters bearing the name of Mrs. Brown-Jones with the hyphen unusually enlarged, and asked if she were willing to have them put up in the office that, "he might put up one of the posters," and also had added this unsolicited testimonial, "what a gilt-edged old bluffer she is." But of course the intelligent reader would not be influenced in his estimate of Mrs. Brown-Jones when we admit that on the morning referred to Mrs. Weedahl had taken considerable wine, and though we know that, "in wine there is truth," we could under the circumstances only assume as a matter of courtesy, that the real facts proved an exception to the old saw.

Mrs. Brown-Jones, in the social inquisition to which it was decided to subject the unfortunate Annette, was to all appearances very unwilling to be hasty or inconsiderate. She was willing to be active in the matter, but as she sweetly remarked, "We should be circumspect and demure," and when Mrs. M'Garrité had answered that "the would be grass widow was demure," Mrs. Brown-Jones had

playfully patted Mrs. M'Garrité on the shoulder with her fair hand, and said, "You are such a funny girl, Maud. Now stop laughing; the poor thing must amuse herself in some way," upon which Mrs. M'Garrité had laughed the more and said she thought "Grassy would find plenty of boys to amuse her," and then Mrs. Brown-Jones had said with a sigh, "Well, the evidence seems to be all against her."

We have, I believe, failed to call the reader's attention to the fact that Mrs. M'Garrité had in spelling her name dropped the "c" that was originally a part of the prefix "M-," and also had changed the final "y" to an "e" with the accent on same, and by so doing, like the ostrich who hides his head in the sand thinking no one will see him, had transferred her family pedigree from Dublin to Paris. Mrs. Weedahl's vulgarity had again been forcibly demonstrated one day when she had said to Mr. Grill that, "Mrs. Mack Garrity was a French woman, but that her potato face was a very good map of Ireland." And here again, as the historian of Mrs. Weedahl, we feel compelled to chronicle the fact that she had taken considerable wine prior to saying this, in fact she was under its influence rather more on this occasion than when she had spoken so disparagingly of Mrs. Brown-Jones, and this statement, as a matter of courtesy, must of course detract in a corresponding degree from the accuracy of Mrs. Weedahl's estimate of Mrs. M'Garrité. Mrs. Brown-Jones and Mrs. M'Garrité were assisted in their efforts to purify the social atmosphere of the Portland by two other ladies, one of whom by her overbearing insolence to the hotel employees

and the oriental costumes she wore was known among the help as the "Empress of China"; and the other a lady who posed as the daughter of an Italian countess, and who by reason of this silly pretense was known as the "Countess Dago." This worthy quartette felt that they were fully competent to do what was needful in making the social circle at the Portland superior to that of any other hotel in the vicinity, and so as self-constituted judges in the matter, it may readily be inferred that the private affairs of the unfortunate Annette would be subjected to such a social cauterizing that all the dross would be burned up even if in achieving this result they cremated their victim at the same time.

It is needless to relate the sickening details of the methods they adopted in proceeding to inflict a process of systematic torture upon their victim. The author, a sinner himself, who feels that he could forgive almost anything unintentionally bad, and whose efforts in this narrative to portray the frailty of mankind and the power of virtue over sin, will be subjected to the most unfair and severe criticism by just such people he has described in the foregoing pages is not willing that the detestable breath of the scandal-monger shall mar the pages of a book that is intended to inspire hope in the heart of erring humanity, rather than give an extra kick to those who are struggling against an evil and seemingly relentless destiny.

Ambrose,—and also Mrs. Weedahl, we are glad to say, tried hard to make Annette feel that the Portland was a congenial home for her. Mrs. Weedahl's apartments were always open for her and she was treated with every consideration when

she called there. Annette made many efforts to be agreeable to other ladies in the hotel, but while some of them treated her with kind politeness they did not call on her, nor did they invite her to call on them; many others merely looked askance at her, for their own social positions were upon such precarious footings that they could not afford to risk the jar, that a little Christian kindness to Annette would have brought upon them.

Ambrose introduced her to his wife and persuaded Mrs. Pierce to call upon Annette in her apartments; Annette also called upon Mrs. Pierce. But right here it is well for the reader to pause, and in a retrospective view of what he has read he will quickly infer that the woman who was so thoroughly congenial to Ambrose would be absolutely uncongenial to his wife. This proved to be exactly the situation. There was no topic or sentiment which could afford to them a basis for congenial intercourse. Even the subject of dress was a failure, and when two women who desire to be agreeable to each other cannot talk about dress goods and fashions, it is safe to assume that they were never intended to be chums, and so a social problem was forced upon Annette whose solution she was not equal to. She was a woman who possessed all the endearing attributes of her sex. She longed for sympathy, kindness and love, but the delicacy of her position was by a misfortune in no way her fault, of such a character that she knew not what to do. She soon abandoned her attempts to be agreeable to the ladies of the Portland, for on many occasions when repeatedly snubbed by them, she had retired to her rooms and wept bitter tears as she prayed to

an Almighty Power for guidance and comfort. During this period of trial and social suffering she could not resist the temptation to visit one place which seemed a natural haven of refuge for her storm-tossed soul, and this place was the office of Ambrose. She naturally was required to go there on many occasions on business relative to her suit for divorce, and the genial welcome she always received there never left a doubt in her mind that she was properly understood and appreciated. In fact we may as well admit right here that her necessary visits to his office were not only needlessly prolonged, but on many occasions she would call when she was not expected. If on these occasions Ambrose was busy or was out of his office she would go away, but if he was disengaged for the afternoon she would sit by his fireplace and they would converse for an hour or more. These interviews, commonplace enough as they were, were a source of great pleasure to both; each felt absolutely at ease in the other's presence. A tacit understanding conveyed by a look alone had been established between them from the first time they had met. Their congeniality for each other made words absolutely needless, and yet words came unbidden. Thus a perfect affinity seemed established, and a bond of friendship existed between them, which unknowingly by both was considered nothing more. Though this was perhaps supposed by Ambrose and Annette to be the limit of their feeling in the matter, we should not fail to note that as the visits of Annette became more and more frequent and the hours more prolonged, this conduct was likely to cause an impression in the mind of a certain individ-

ual that Ambrose and Annette felt more than a friendly interest in each other, and that he had a silent duty to perform in connection with this new state of affairs. The aforesaid impression and sense of duty existed in the mind of Adolph, who in an adjoining room with open door was ever present, but ever absent; Adolph seemed to feel a sense of delicate propriety on these occasions which was perhaps in its affect the most palpable evidence of business discretion that has ever been recorded. In addition to his well-known attributes of silence, he, on these occasions added to his phlegmatic temperament the power of being deaf, dumb, blind and invisible. This conduct on the part of Adolph irritated Ambrose and amused Annette. The two different effects upon the minds of the lawyer and his client, which the conduct of Adolph inspired, may be taken as an indication of the degree of serious feeling that existed in the heart of each, and also their innocence of intentional wrong. They both, at times, entertained a secret fear that they were drifting on dangerous seas, but in this partly secret but pardonable enjoyment of each other's society they felt a sense of honest liberty, which the many years of suffering they had each endured seemed to peacefully justify in their hearts the few hours of happiness they thus stole from a hopeless destiny.

The subject of their conversations were always those things nearest their hearts, and as a natural sequence they derived such consolation and comfort from their meetings, as only those mortals whose conditions of life were similar could possibly understand.

One bright afternoon when the sun shone with

such genial warmth that it seemed to herald the near approach of spring, Annette called as usual and though she had been there but two days before she made no attempt to conceal the delight she felt at finding Ambrose disengaged and at leisure for the remainder of the day. His own honest smile of welcome was answered by a joyous laugh from Annette who eagerly extended both hands as she earnestly greeted him. Then removing her hat and a light wrap she wore she snugly nestled back in a huge leather chair and looked at him with a gaze in which content, confidence and affection as well were plainly evident. Then feeling perhaps that she had not been sufficiently decorous in the ardor of her greeting, and as she felt a tinge of color in her cheeks, she looked at him again and with an arch smile said, "It is so good to be here; you advise me; you teach me; you console me so much," and then with another smile, "Your open fireplace is so cheerful." At this moment the noise of falling books and a chair being moved was heard in the adjoining room, also several coughs were heard, which Ambrose at once understood and accepted as a notice that Adolph was about to intrude upon them. He made no comment, but as Adolph came in he reached to his desk and taking therefrom a box of voice lozenges he extended the open box toward Adolph, merely saying without the shadow of a smile on his face, "Take one." The solemn face of Ambrose and the ludicrous expression on that of Adolph were irresistibly funny to Annette. Her merriment was uncontrollable and she laughed so heartily that Adolph finally decided to laugh also, and then Ambrose followed suit. Adolph's

cough was never especially noticeable after that day.

"Now," said Annette, "please sit down. I want to talk to you. I don't need the fireplace to-day, though I see you have a fire as usual. I will admit that before going any further. But this bright day when everybody seemed to be so happy, made me feel so lonely that I felt I must see you. I don't know just what my feelings were, but it was doubtless an impulse inspired by the knowledge that my troubles would be forgotten while here. You are so kind, and you understand me so well that you appear to read my every thought. Tell me, do you admit the necessity for such a thing as mental nursing outside of a mad house?"

"Indeed,—yes," said Ambrose. "Prevention is always easier than cure, and I understand its necessity so well that I can best explain myself by the expression of a reciprocal thought. I have often felt that a confessional outside of the church, presided over by a woman of heart and mind, would be for some men, under certain conditions, better than the uncertainty of a prayer to the Infinite."

Annette looked at him intently and a light of grateful appreciation shone in her eyes as she answered, "But you are stronger than I. You are the good and honorable judge by nature as well as by name. You are so strong in virtue that a weak mortal like me is irresistibly drawn to you as the ivy to the oak, and in the secret thoughts of your noble heart—nay, nay, please hear me," as Ambrose made a gesture of dissent. "I fully understand the credit that is due you for the sacrifice you have made for many years in response to the demands of virtue,

and I pity you as much as I respect you, and so I ask, down in your secret heart, what sentiment do you feel toward a woman who thus looks up to you? Judge me from a high standard of purity and virtue and tell me how much I need?"

"I would not judge you or any one else from such a standpoint," said Ambrose. "I am weak and unworthy myself, but I do not believe that any one who is very good or very bad could be a just or competent judge of others. My views, however, in these matters are not accepted as tenable by society. In fact it was my experience while on the bench to find that society waged a rigid war against me and forced me into the retirement of private life, for the reason that I honestly sought to live up to the conviction I have just expressed."

"What a pity," said Annette, "that even a judge in the discharge of his official duty must be an actor."

"Yes," said Ambrose, "it is sad, but true, and your conception of this truth not only applies to judges, but to clergymen as well. Society measures the respectability of a sinner by his discretion and the most successful clergymen, judges and politicians are those who possess sufficient intelligence to realize this, and tact enough to handle it with gloves in the discharge of their respective duties. Society would charge me with being severely radical if I were to say that such men must harmonize in their hearts the teachings of the Bible with those of Shakespeare and Emelie Zola; but there is, or rather was, a common ground; the Bible, prior to its many revisions, the original Shakespeare, the works of Zola, all written to serve the most useful

purposes, were alike subject to the criticisms of false modesty, and alike open to its moral questioning. They teach us that as children of Adam and Eve, we are sinners, and that in this world we can hope to be but little else, but that we should be natural; do as near right as we can and hope for a better world. They also teach us that all earthly peace and happiness is born of our justice to humanity, and if Adam and Eve when driven from the Garden of Eden were forever forced to realize their nakedness, what useful purpose to-day can false modesty serve?"

"We might assume," said Annette, "as an answer to that question, that one of the deplorable results is that it places a false value on virtue as well as gold."

"Yes," said Ambrose, "it does indeed; the false ideas of society have placed virtue beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, because gold is its price. This of course is a most unworthy theory, the merest sham indeed, but it is sadly true that the great men of to-day must bow to it in silence as a price of their prominence. It is true also that occasionally, in the language of the turf, they 'bluff' at an attempt to use harsh language, but their supposedly invisible wink is always perceptible, and society tolerates it with a sigh of content that it isn't law, or else, perhaps, it is evidenced by some clergymen whose motives are even less commendable, in the fact that his misguided tongue lashing of social evils is inspired by a desire for notoriety and personal gain. In this social system of ours, preachers preach before their time, but in doing so the only thing they damage is theology. Judges hang their

mistakes ; doctors bury theirs, and the end is oblivion. But what shall we say of the unreal, unworthy ignorance of society to-day, that by the power of gold manacles church, court and school, and moulds the moral sentiment of a community to a condition of hypocrisy as needless as it is abominable ? ”

“ Well,” said Annette with a smile, “ consistency is said to be a jewel, and men have ever been consistent in one respect, they have never made a law that would punish a woman because she was an outcast.”

“ No,” said Ambrose quickly, “ but their consistency in this respect is about as praiseworthy as that of the man who cursed and abused his faithful wife, and then went down-town and took off his hat because a girl was in the elevator. Men deserve no credit for their failure to enact such a law when their consistency is inspired by purely animal motives of self-interest.”

“ Then,” said Annette, “ when the man took off his hat to the girl in the elevator he deserved no credit for his courtesy ? ”

“ Well,” said Ambrose, “ so thin a veneer of manly courtesy to woman is not entitled to very much credit. Perhaps I can prove my meaning better by saying that when blindfolded justice weighs a man in the balance and finds him wanting, he himself is generally the last to learn that his measure has been taken, for the power to see ourselves as others see us is a favor that nature never bestows. For instance, a man may be known in society as irresistibly charming to women, but let him ask a worthy girl to be his wife, and her prompt re-

fusal will, if he has good sense, prove for him in some degree a very needful mirror."

Ambrose here noted an expression of extreme sadness on the face of Annette, and in silence he gazed at her intently as if to divine the cause. Presently she looked up at him saying, "I wonder if society is treating my husband the way it is treating me?"

"Well," said Ambrose, "the fact that he has \$80,000 and that you have eighty cents, will give a large balance of society favor to him. If the sheriff were now residing at the Portland in your place, he would perhaps get smiles where you receive frowns. I suppose that your reputation in Raleigh has suffered considerably at his hands since your departure, for thus does society reward virtue and punish crime. A knowledge of such rank injustice has made me almost a recluse when for many years I have raised my poor voice in protest to be mocked at for my pains."

Another pause in the conversation was at length broken by Annette, who said,

"Those who can feel the most, suffer the most. It has been my fate to suffer; God only knows how much. Chained by law as I was to a wretch, the very sight of whom was repulsive to me, it seemed the irony of fate that I should have been born and perfected as a woman of ideal senses only to be mocked at by an animal. For many years I endured his curses for the sake of doing my duty to God and a society that now condemns me. I have often thought that words kill more than blows, for even if they do not destroy the life, they make us dead to feeling, and then death in reality is almost

preferable to a life which is robbed of its every charm."

Ambrose was startled by her words uttered with a passionate feeling that indicated new-born hope in her heart, and which finding an echo in his own breast would have prompted him to respond by a caress, only that now her expression of grief at an experience in some respects similar to his own could only intensify the bitterness of a fate that stood like an impassible barrier between them. He bitterly felt that life held out for her some hope of happiness, and that he would be as a further illustration of the irony of fate she had deplored, the legal instrument for her use in its attainment. As these bitter thoughts surged through his mind, he felt his weakness of heart and breathed a prayer for strength to obey the relentless demand that virtue made of him in this hour of temptation. His sense of duty was subjected to a further strain by a revelation of her feelings toward her husband which Ambrose had not suspected, but which her words had implied, so he made it at once the subject of inquiry.

"I infer from what you say," said he, "that you do not love your husband at all, and that you never have loved him very much?"

Annette started and leaned forward toward him, her face and attitude expressive of most earnest feeling, as she replied, "Surely you do not think that any remnant of affection for him could remain in my heart, knowing what you do; surely, Ambrose! Judge, I mean," and the crimson color rushed to her face as in her intense earnestness and desire to convince him of her sincerity, the bridge of conventionality existing between them was

momentarily swept away. "How could I love him? I, love a monster? Tell me," she said pleadingly, "you do not think that of me, for I despise him."

The smile on the face of Ambrose was one of pity and also that of another sensation, difficult to interpret, as he answered in a serious tone, "I believe you entirely, but you know a woman's heart is readable only when she really is known to love."

Again the smile of Annette was easy of interpretation, as she replied, "And you cannot read mine."

Ambrose hesitated, as he answered slowly and in a low tone, "No I cannot read it."

Annette leaned back in her chair for a moment in thoughtful silence. Then she said, "I am not willing that any doubt should remain in your mind with regard to my sentiments toward my husband, either as to the past or present. I never really loved him. When I married him I did so by reason of the fact that my parents thought it would be a desirable match. I did my duty as a wife, and had he been a man who deserved a true wife, even though I could not love him I would have died rather than be unfaithful or leave him, but in addition to his infidelity and his frequent condition of being intoxicated, he was naturally abhorrent to me. He of course gave me money and clothed me well, but I never saw the moment when any phase of his natural self was congenial to me, and so my life in his society was ever one of mental torture. Is it possible, in your opinion, that some people are so constituted that the impression they make upon others is that of poison?"

“Yes,” said Ambrose. “Listen to me. Your words call up in my mind an experience I had a few years ago, the relation of which will perhaps answer your question. I had for many years felt a desire to return to the home of my boyhood, and to wander once more in the old fields and paths I knew so well. I determined to spend a day or so in doing this, and so one morning took a train out of town for that purpose. On arriving at the nearest railroad station I had a distance of about five miles to walk or ride, and as it was a fine day I decided to walk. I strode along rapidly and presently overtook a heavily loaded team which rumbled slowly along drawn by four mules. The driver was cracking a long whip the sharp report of which echoed among the hills, and occasionally calling to his mules. As I looked up in passing the team I recognized an old friend of my boyhood in the person of the driver, who was then a hale old man of about sixty-five. He remembered me, and stopping his team insisted that I should get on the seat beside him and ride. I did so, and as we rode along we chatted pleasantly of old times. In response to my inquiries he told me he had been quite prosperous; he owned his home and other properties as well, also a number of good wagons and teams. I remarked that it was time he took a rest and let others take care of the teams. He said he had stopped work several years ago, but had to begin again. He said, ‘When I decided to quit work I got a good man to manage my teams and drive. He took care of the teams all right; drove ’em easy, fed ’em all right, kept the stables clean, made good beds for ’em every night, but somehow

or other the mules went wrong ; they began to look sick like, and got so poor and thin that they could not pull a load. At last I sent the man off and took keer of the mules myself, and then they got fat and strong again,' upon saying which the old man cracked his whip and said, 'Gee haw' to the mules and then blurted out, 'Some people is pizen to mules.' He then lapsed into silence and we rode on for some time without speaking, for the old man seemed to realize as I did that he had stumbled upon a great truth and one which did not apply to mules alone."

"Well," said Annette, "I not only understand the forcible impression the old teamster's words made on you, for in some respects I think I know you better than you know yourself, but you can perhaps better understand that if those dumb mules were sickened by the man that was 'pizen' to them, how much more would a woman like myself suffer whose fate had been worse than theirs?"

"Yes," said Ambrose, "it was no fault of the mules and we were equally blameless. The experience of those dumb and innocent brutes, who in some degree were susceptible to the influence of congenial treatment, is sufficient proof of the fact that many people are sincere and honest when they cry aloud that the burden of a life of misery brought upon them by an unhappy marriage is more than they can bear."

Annette noted with intense interest that Ambrose had for the first time, by using the word "we," inadvertently admitted a condition of his own unhappiness that he considered a secret of his inmost heart, but which the astute and penetrative

Mrs. Weedahl had long ago learned, and had made a special topic of conversation in her talks with Annette. Mrs. Weedahl had always been made to feel a sense of her moral unworthiness in her business relations with Ambrose and while she realized her personal impotence to make his conscience subservient to her immoral nature, she, with a malice born of an evil desire to drag him down to her level had deliberately, but with the caution of a serpent sought to make of the lovely but unhappy Annette a medium to accomplish her purpose. Annette had in the grateful regard she felt for Ambrose and by the nature of her troubles lent herself innocently to the cherished hope of Mrs. Weedahl, and Ambrose in his line of business, his sense of duty, and his intense admiration of Annette, as a charming woman, had unconsciously done the same. But while this power of Satan was at work to imperil the souls of our hero and his client they were themselves engaged in an innocent but dangerous study of the problem of human happiness by a contact of senses as personified in an exquisite woman and a man whose heart and mind were responsive to her every feeling.

“And so,” said Annette, “by what name should we call the disease when we thus sicken of misery? A broken heart is too common, and is not accepted by sense and reason.”

“Well,” said Ambrose, “our doctors and other professional men do not seem to realize, and if they do they will not admit it, that there are many incurable diseases of mankind, which might be properly diagnosed and treated as original sin. The only successful treatment of such a disease,”

said Ambrose smiling, "is to remove the cause, and thus secure a healthy growth of nature by gratifying the refined emotions and suppressing the weeds of evil thought."

"Your story of the mules then is a true one," said Annette thoughtfully.

"It is true in every word as I have related it," said Ambrose.

"Then," said Annette, "I am sure that we are sometimes mistaken in our interpretation of Divine Laws," and she said this with a decisive manner and tone that evidenced an unchangeable conviction.

CHAPTER VII

THE CANDLE AND THE MOTHS

THE days and the weeks flew by and the visits of Annette to the office of Ambrose became almost a daily occurrence. She made no attempt to conceal the pleasure these visits afforded her, and Ambrose after a hard struggle with conventionality abandoned himself to the pleasure that her society gave him. Annette had by her confidence in him forced him into the position of one who should measure by his self-control the degree of intimacy that should exist between them, and the line of decorum that he thus drew grew more imperceptible each day, as their regard for each other increased and swept it from view. They both realized the hopelessness of the affection they felt for each other, and the danger to their peace of mind that was threatened as a certain result of these meetings, but the joy they felt in thus seeing each other was such a reflex action on their senses, so inured to misery in the past, that they naturally became oblivious to all else save the fact that they were happy together. They lived when in the society of each other, and existence otherwise was only made tolerable by the hope that on the morrow they would meet again. At the Portland this state of affairs was not suspected by any one save Mrs. Weedahl. She alone with her depraved, but quick intuition was accurately

responsive to every suggestion of immorality, and in her receptive mind she found no difficulty in reversing to their true position the apparent lack of interest that Ambrose and Annette showed for each other, and she also understood that the unusual and marked attention which Ambrose showed to his wife was born of a guilty conscience and pity rather than increased affection for her. She also had alone taken the trouble to learn where Annette was during her many hours of absence from the hotel, and her apparently motherly interest in her had found expression one day at the office counter in a rather sharp retort to Mrs. M'Garrité, when that lady had giggled a question as to the whereabouts of Annette, as follows:—

“Where does the grass widow go every day, Mrs. Weedahl? I am dying of curiosity, and is she still Mrs. Caldwell or somebody else?”

Mrs. Weedahl answered, “I know where she goes and her friends can know also; other people need not concern themselves. She is still known as Mrs. Caldwell, and will continue to be so known until she decides to be known otherwise.”

Mr. Grill finally became suspicious and so expressed himself to Mrs. Weedahl who had said to him,—

“Mr. Grill, you are a hotel man and your business as such is to see everything, hear everything, and know nothing, unless you are compelled by business reasons to do so. When a case reaches the stage where you are compelled to see it, be sure to see me before you take any action.”

One day Annette failed to call at his office, though Ambrose had advised her that her suit for

divorce had been decided favorably for her and that she would probably obtain her decree at once. He wondered why she had not called, and when he did not see her in the dining-room as usual that evening, he thought perhaps she was ill, but he made no inquiry or comment regarding her. As he started to go out for a few minutes after dinner he was stopped by a bell-boy who said that Mrs. Weedahl would like to see him in her private parlor at his convenience. He informed the boy that he would be out but a few minutes and would stop there on his return to see Mrs. Weedahl, as requested. He soon returned, and tapping at the door of Mrs. Weedahl's parlor was invited to enter. Mrs. Weedahl's manner as she greeted Ambrose was one that indicated a mind that was engaged in the consideration of a very serious matter. Ambrose had seen her in just such moods before, and he at once realized as he had realized on other occasions, that in the business consideration of a subject where her interests were aroused, her conception of a condition of things was so clear and her convictions were so unchangeable that her decision was apparent as her meaning was made clear.

"Ambrose," she said, "I want to talk to you. How are you getting along with Annette's divorce case?"

"The decree was given me to-day," said Ambrose. "We have been entirely successful. Mrs. Caldwell will receive \$10,000 cash, and the sheriff must pay her nine hundred dollars per year in quarterly payments while she remains unmarried. If she marries again she forfeits the yearly income."

"You have done well for her, Ambrose," said

Mrs. Weedahl and she smiled upon him graciously, as she realized that Annette's obligations to her would be easily cancelled. "I am glad the poor thing has won, for it will make her mind easy in one respect as least. It wasn't especially about her divorce suit that I wanted to talk to you, but about Annette herself, and about you, Ambrose; you too," and she smiled significantly, waiting for him to reply.

"I don't think I quite understand you, Mrs. Weedahl," said he.

"Oh, yes, you do," said the lady. "You understand me only too well, but I will make it plainer for you, just the same. Annette has been at your office very often of late."

"She comes there on business relative to her case occasionally, that is true."

"Occasionally, you say; almost every day, and it is dark when she leaves as a rule. Now Ambrose, this is no time for subterfuge or evasion. I have eyes, and if no one else knows what is going on I do. I have kept it strictly to myself and even sat on Grill the other day because he ventured to voice a suspicion. Your conduct lately toward your wife and your apparent indifference to Annette here in the house were as clear to me as spring water. Ambrose, when a bank cashier becomes most active in his church work, it is a good time to learn if his bondsmen are good, and to change the safe combination. When a married man shows devotion to a wife whom he has previously neglected it is because his love for another woman is a constant reminder that he owes some sort of a similar duty to his wife. Am I right or not? answer me."

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Ambrose felt that Mrs. Weedahl knew much more and also that she had much to say. His power of perception and his shrewdness as an experienced and fair-minded lawyer were no match for the subtlety of the Jewess, whose intuition in matters of natural depravity was rendered more dangerous by her mature age and the fact that questions of conscience were never under any conditions considered by her in the attainment of an object. He could perceive by her manner that too much evasion on his part would lower her estimate of his good sense, and also perhaps damage Annette in her estimation; so he decided to admit in a general way that her conclusions were not entirely wrong.

"Mrs. Weedahl," he said, "I do esteem Mrs. Caldwell very highly, and I felt great sympathy for her unfortunate condition; of course she is now independent of me and of you, too, but I have no doubt she feels very grateful to both you and I. I am also willing to believe that she is not so heartless, but that she feels some little regard for me; but now that she has or will have to-morrow the decree of divorce that frees her from her husband and the money that will free her from us, she will doubtless consider the incident as closed."

Mrs. Weedahl looked at him compassionately. "How modest and wise you are, Ambrose. You, a judge; a lawyer, who has had that woman running to your office every day, and staying there until you had to put her out; a most lovely and charming woman whom you could see lived only in your presence, lived only in the sunshine of your smile, the music of your voice; why a blind and deaf

mute would be more susceptible to impressions than what you have admitted, and then you say that 'she perhaps feels some little regard for you; that she will consider the incident closed.' Bah! you are slow for a lawyer. So, let me tell you something that in your stupidity you have failed to see. Annette is head over ears in love with you."

Ambrose started forward, clutching at the arms of his chair. "In love?" he said.

"That's what I said. In love, gone, completely gone, I tell you; she confessed it to me this afternoon."

The face of Ambrose was white and rigid, as with staring eyes he looked at Mrs. Weedahl, who, with cold distinctness and a manner devoid of any appearance of feeling, save that of a gratified ambition, thus stated a result which he had in some degree foreseen.

"She confessed it to you?" he said.

"Yes, she confessed it. She didn't want to admit it. At first she stoutly and nervously denied it; disavowed it totally and repeatedly, but as I convinced her that I knew everything, the tears came to her eyes, her face grew red and she trembled from head to foot, and finally when I told her that I alone knew these things, and that I would never betray her secret by a look or word to any living soul, and that I did not blame her for feeling an affection for a man like you, she broke down completely and said, 'Yes, I do love him with all my heart and soul. It is the first time I have ever loved a man. I worship him, I idolize him. He is my only thought through the day, and I dream of him in my sleep. Life in any form apart from him

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would be a thousand times worse than the ten years of hell I endured before I met him,' and then she rushed at me, threw herself in my arms, saying, 'Oh! Mrs. Weedahl, my heart is breaking; pity me, help me. You are a woman like myself; tell me what to do, for my life is a question in this hopeless love,' and then she hugged me until I thought she would break my neck, and kissed me, and then as I could not answer her, she left me and throwing herself on that sofa, hid her face among the cushions, sobbing with grief as if her heart was broken indeed."

Ambrose sat like one stupefied, cold and motionless. The only visible signs of his agitation were in the marble whiteness of his face, his staring eyes, and the great beads of perspiration that stood upon his brow. Stunned beyond the power to speak by what the Jewess had said, his silence seemed deadly in its intensity. It was the stillness that precedes the bursting of a thunder-storm, and an expression of real alarm appeared on the face of the red-eyed blonde, who, partly divining his thoughts, hastened tremblingly to undo in some degree the wrong she had done Annette in thus betraying her.

"Of course, Ambrose," she said, "I did not feel that I was doing any harm in telling you this, for I knew or felt that you knew it, and that it would perhaps be better for you both, if I told you," and she feebly essayed an ingenuous smile.

Ambrose arose from his chair, and with a firm step approached her. He leaned forward toward her and his right hand grasped a plaster figure of a miniature Ethiopian that stood upon a heavy carved table near the chair in which she was seated. In a

voice that was hoarse with suppressed emotion he said, "Mrs. Weedahl, as you have learned the truth from Annette, you shall be my confessor as well. You have repeatedly charged me with having too much conscience. You have sought to force me in my financial misfortunes to be a willing tool for your trickery and deceit. You have sought to use me as a lawyer in such a way that my profession as well as myself would be degraded. It was you who first sent Annette to me. It was you who in the guise of a friend brought her into this room where you regaled her with wine, as well as overdrawn pictures of me. It was you who told her of my estrangement from my wife. It was you who urged her to come to me every day, and, alas! for once, Mrs. Weedahl, I have been a blind and willing tool in the work of ruin you have wrought. Your work, and mine also has been well done. So hear me as you heard her. I love too, and for the first time in my life. I love Annette far more than she loves me," and as he uttered these words he crushed the Ethiopian figure to powder as he hurled it down upon the oaken table. Then turning upon his heel he started to leave the room, but at the door he paused, and retracing his steps clutched with a grip of iron the arm of the now thoroughly frightened woman who faintly screamed with pain and terror, as she gazed into his eyes and read in them the terrible meaning of the words he uttered.

"Mrs. Weedahl," he said, "you now know all, all, only that Annette is still innocent and pure; but if you ever breathe to a living soul one word of the confessions you have thus forced from Annette and

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me, it will cost you your life, and perhaps my own as well."

And then he strode through the hallway and out into the street; out into the cool night air. With fevered brain and rapid strides he rushed along the street whither, he knew not and cared not. He only knew that this action was in some degree a relief; that the cool wind upon his burning head would perhaps save him from madness; that the faster he walked the greater relief he felt, and so he increased his speed until he almost ran. He presently found himself upon a business thoroughfare where many people were walking, and where the bright glaring lights of shop windows shone upon his grief-stricken face. The boisterous laughter of an occasional group of young people as they passed jarred upon his disturbed senses, and in pushing aside some persons who did not yield him absolute right of way as he tore along the street he became gradually conscious of the fact that he was not only rude, but that he was attracting a degree of public attention usually accorded to an unfortunate mortal whose mental balance is subject to question. As he thus became conscious of the attention he was attracting, he stopped in front of the bulk window of a store in which a variety of fancy goods was displayed, and which was lighted by an arc lamp of intense brilliancy. Ambrose did not see the contents of the window. He gazed fixedly at the glaring arc light and felt no pain in doing so. Presently he resumed his walk, but less rapidly and the hours and distance were unnoted by him. At length when nature could endure no more a feeling of the relief that exhaustion sometimes brings came over

him. He paused again and looked around. He soon located himself and found that he was at the lower end of the business portion of the city. With reeling steps he supported himself on an iron railing by a basement entrance and looking upward, silently prayed in his grief and despair. Then surrendering himself in absolute submission to his feeling of utter helplessness he fell upon a near-by door-step and calmly awaited an impulse for further action. The struggle in his heart was ended. The years of misery he had endured had weakened the moral strength of this strong man ; in his hopeless despair love's final assault had triumphed, and in meek submission he bowed his head to the conqueror.

Presently a coupe rumbled along on its way uptown. Ambrose arose and staggering into the street hailed the driver, who glad to secure a passenger opened the door of the coupe and assisted him to get in.

"Take me to the Portland," was all he said.

Ambrose slept until late the next morning, and then rousing himself he hurriedly dressed and ordered some breakfast sent to his room. He then started at once for his office and on his arrival there he dispatched with feverish haste some business demanding his attention. Then after luncheon he placed upon his desk Annette's decree of divorce with other papers and securities, as well as a cash payment that had been made for her, and impatiently awaited the coming of his client. As the hours dragged by and she did not come a fear for her safety crept into his heart, and in his imagination he guessed every reason but the correct one for her delay. He had

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fought over again the battle of the previous evening, and had determined that his strength of purpose should be greater than hers, and that he would be to the last the man she had estimated him to be.

Annette did not arrive until four o'clock. She came in quietly and extending her hand greeted Ambrose as usual, only that he could not fail to observe in her manner a reserve that had never marked her conduct before. She was attired in the same street costume that she had worn on the day that she had met Ambrose at the depot at Raleigh. She wore on her breast a small corsage bouquet of violets, and though her eyes showed in some degree the suffering she too had endured on the previous evening, she seemed in her pensive manner to appeal more than ever to the love she had inspired in the heart of Ambrose.

"I have been worrying about you," said Ambrose, as they seated themselves at his desk. "I thought perhaps you were ill, but I am glad to find that my alarm was needless. I have here your decree and some securities and cash which I will turn over to you. The balance of the court's award to you will be provided for here at my office in a few days."

Annette signed a receipt for the cash and securities, and then said, "I am sorry that I kept you waiting for me, but I have been busily engaged to-day in looking for another home. I shall leave the Portland on Monday."

"Indeed," said Ambrose, "do you really mean this?"

"Yes," said Annette, "I have decided to take a furnished flat at a place but a few blocks from the

Portland, known as the Richelieu. My maid whom you know will go there with me."

She watched Ambrose closely as she said this, and eagerly noted the effect her words produced upon him. He could not conceal the dejection he felt, and his face plainly indicated this feeling. Annette then continued, "I hope you will call there to see me, and of course, bring Mrs. Pierce, also." This portion of her invitation was added in a lower tone.

Ambrose felt that he could not look at her and retain his self-control, so he arose and without a word walked over to the fireplace in which a fire was blazing, and seating himself in a huge leather chair gazed silently at the fire. Annette remained at his desk for a moment and a happy smile appeared on her face, as she noted the effort he was making at self-control; then feeling that he was really disappointed at her decision to leave the Portland, and that he felt at least a warm regard for her apart from every other consideration, she left his desk and seating herself near him, said softly, "Ambrose, you have been more than a friend to me. There is no way in which I can repay you. Had it not been for you, I know not what my fate would have been, and I am selfish enough to ask as a last favor that if you cannot come to see me, you will let me come here, sometimes, to see you."

"Yes," said Ambrose, "come; why didn't you come yesterday? I thought you would surely be here, and I left word at the office for you to call here in the afternoon."

He looked at her so intently as he said this that Annette felt that there was some hidden meaning

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in his words and the crimson color in her face was her only answer. Then she said, "Have you seen Mrs. Weedahl during the past few days?"

It was now Ambrose's turn to conceal or tell the truth, and he answered with some nonchalance, "I saw her for a few minutes last evening."

"Where?"

Again Ambrose hesitated, but answered, "In her private parlor."

The profound silence of several minutes that followed was broken only by the ticking of a clock, and the occasional crackle of the fire. During this time their eyes were fixed upon each other. The silence was broken by Annette.

"Did she say—did she tell you—anything about me?"

Ambrose was silent, and Annette reaching forward grasped his arm as with burning eyes she gazed into his.

"Tell me," she whispered passionately. "How much did she tell you?"

"All," said Ambrose.

"All?"

"Yes, all."

Annette sank back in her chair, and the hard expression that Ambrose had seen once before, came over her face. He could recall but one previous occasion when he had noted this expression, and that was on the stormy day when she had first called on him. He had then interpreted it as a feeling of degraded resignation inspired by the knowledge that she must reveal the story of her married misery to a stranger. He now felt that it expressed a similar feeling of degradation caused by the be-

trayal of her passionate and unreserved avowal of love for him, and which she was not sure was reciprocated. Her ungloved hand shielded her eyes in her silent embarrassment, but at length leaning forward she gazed at Ambrose so intently that her look gave all needed emphasis to the faint tone of her next inquiry.

“And what—did you—say to her?”

“I confessed to her that I loved you far more than you loved me.”

As Ambrose uttered these words, the eyes of Annette fell beneath his gaze, and she stared fixedly at the fire in silence. He arose, and, with folded arms, stood erect in front of the fireplace. A stick of wood burned in twain, fell in a bed of coals, and the stillness was broken only by the crackling of the flames that followed. Ambrose seemed to note only the flickering shadows on the wall, but at length his thoughts again found expression. His agitation was plainly evidenced by the secret he revealed, and his tones were marked by a gasping quickness and abrupt explosive force, as he said:

“Years ago—an old friend of mine—in the insanity and misery that, if endured in silence, leads to suicide—confided to me the secret of his heart. No harm can come from telling his secret now. He was a fine-looking, manly fellow,—for many years a young bachelor;—flirted with lots of girls,—never fell in love;—got tired of trying to fall in love;—decided to get married anyhow;—thirty years old;—picked out stylish society girl,—more or less congenial—— Became engaged to her;—no love, mere business courtesy—— Date set for wedding—she introduced him to her chum,—sweet, pretty

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girl,—golden hair. Engaged girls shouldn't introduce their chums that way,—or perhaps they should,—I don't know ——— My friend fell in love with the chum at once ——— He didn't think it was real love, though ——— Thought it was the same kind of a—er—neuralgia—he had had so often before ——— Cupid is such a provoking rascal ——— Never gets into a game at the right time ——— Always too early or else too late ——— Of course my friend was in a fix ——— If he gave up to the girl he was engaged to, her chum would cut him dead, —and then too he was an honorable fellow—so he let things go on and got married as agreed ——— Then they had a home in the country. Chum girl came often,—every week;—seemed to like the husband almost as well as she did the wife ——— Wife apologized for chum coming so often ——— Husband said, 'Oh! he didn't care—nice, cheerful girl ——— Rather liked to see her around.' Chum went to summer resorts with them ——— Drives—golf—dancing, etc. ——— Many times near the whirlpool—floated away again ——— With the husband the chum was always charming and free ——— Patted him on the shoulder ——— Such a nice boy—innocently she forced him to set a limit of decorum ——— Hard job for a husband who was trying to be good under aggravating conditions ——— He wasn't designed to be a Mark Tapley ——— Three years passed away ——— No improvement,—bad to worse ——— Moonlight night ——— June ——— Wife away ——— Two weeks' visit ——— Husband alone in summer-house on lawn ——— Sees charming girl coming toward him ——— The chum of course. 'No, she isn't home ——— Been away over

a week—— I was quite lonely—— Stay and console me,' he says—— She remains some time—— There isn't anything to talk about—— Absence of interested party forces naked truth to surface—— His nudity is apparent—— Evening dress won't do—— They are standing side by side in the summer-house—— Both intently looking at some miserable little flower that grows on a vine—— Heads rather close together—— Difficult breathing—— He don't know just how it happened, but his hand is resting lightly on her shoulder—— He swore to me he didn't know how it got there—— But she didn't mind it at all—— He was surprised—bewildered—intoxicated—temperature 108—pulse 109—— They are still gazing intently at the flower which of course in the semi-darkness, they cannot see—— The pressure of his hand is heavier—— It burns upon her shoulder—— Poor, miserable little flower—— They had never seen anything so wonderful before—— She is speaking—— 'It has a rather subtle, undefinable odor—— Did he know its name?' 'Oh! *Convolvulus Lapidora*,' he said, guessing at it wildly. His other hand was holding hers—— 'The simplest flowers have most horrible Latin names you know.' Both tried to laugh, but sighed instead—— 'Do you understand Latin?' she says,—flag still flying. 'Oh, yes——' 'And German?' 'Oh, yes, no, what did you say? No, I don't know the first thing about Latin and German—— Did I say I did? How strange—— I don't know what I did say——' His right hand was firmly grasping her shoulder, and the perfume of her hair was more perceptible to him than the odor of the jessamine,

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—decorous pretense was thrown to the winds,—and as she trembled in his embrace,—they confessed their love — Well —

“ Their secret love lasted for over two years—sighs — bliss—grief—joy—and all that sort of thing — Then she disappeared — Wrote him a letter,—away off somewhere — Thousand miles—said she had married an old man — Would never see him again — Begged him to forgive and forget — conscience—despair — Then he came to me — stark raving mad — Wanted to shoot himself — He was deaf to reason—sense all gone — Above the noise he made, I shouted for him to go and shoot the old man — A year or so after this, she wrote to him again — Begged him to come and see her — He went—found her dying with consumption — Living skeleton—just able to lift her hand — Old man husband a myth — She hadn't married at all — He would give his life to save her — Consulted great doctors — They shook their wise old heads — Said tuberculosis—phthisis — Scientific names of diseases, they did not understand — Rot — Miserable rot — They either could not or would not understand — A man or woman who can feel is so born — Many can never know — Some people mentally—can enjoy or suffer more in a year than others can in a lifetime — God pity them—for the blood of humanity is hot or cold according to the degree in which the senses have been perfected — The fires of passion—the unspoken words—the silent agony—the joy—the misery — The fight of conscience against fate for the sake of virtue—with fate the conqueror — These are the

things that kill—— And the wise doctors also talked to him about infinitesimal microbes—— Bah!—Of course the girl died—— But in the original sin that Adam and Eve transmitted to posterity—— To some a perfected heritage for bliss or woe—lay the cause and cure of her disease—as it does with all who are so afflicted.”

Annette pale and motionless still sat gazing silently into the fire, her hands rigidly clasping the arms of her chair; but she said not a word, and Ambrose continued as before,—

“Last night after my interview with Mrs. Weedahl, instead of taking the elevator I took a walk—— Oh! quite a walk—about three hours,—at least twenty miles—— At midnight when I could go no further, and sat down to rest on a stone step near the wharves—I thought of my friend—I had at heart always condemned him for his weakness in the summer-house—— But last evening—at midnight—I forgave him——”

At this moment the door leading from Adolph's room was opened with more or less preliminary noise, and simultaneously a gentle cough was heard. Adolph by some strange intuition seemed to feel that his cough was now permissible, and we might add that no remonstrance implied or otherwise, seemed forthcoming from either the lawyer or his client. Adolph wore his overcoat and with hat in hand announced that he was about to leave for the day.

Ambrose nodded assent, and as Adolph closed the outer door after him, they heard the dead-latch click and the sound of his footsteps, as he went down the stairs.

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When Ambrose reached home that evening it was past the dinner hour, and as he stopped at the office for his mail, he noticed on one of the letters that the clerk gave him, the handwriting of his wife. He nervously tore open the envelope and read, as follows:—

“MY DEAR AMBROSE:

“I am going out to supper with sister,—and will not be home until late. When you go to your room, don’t forget to look at your beautiful wife.

“MARGARET.”

Ambrose hastened to his apartments, and on the chiffonier in his room, in a gilt frame, was the ivory type photo of his wife, looking up at him with the loving smile which he himself had suggested.

CHAPTER VIII

DETECTIVES—AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL

THE day following the events we have narrated was Sunday, and Ambrose, who slept until late, was aroused by the ringing of church bells. This summons to duty did not fall upon heedless ears. In its effect upon him at this particular moment, it was a most unwelcome sound. A sense of undefinable horror filled his heart and mind. Alone with his thoughts, and with his mind clear and free from all counteracting influences he felt that in his capacity of lawyer and judge he should banish from his thoughts every consideration of a conscience that inspired fear and foreboding, and analyze from a cold judicial standpoint if possible the love that had conquered him.

The harsh and increasing clamor of the church bells, as they smote his sense of hearing and his perturbed mind, seemed to voice only the seventh commandment, and their discordant notes added to the feeling of despair that ran riot in his heart and filled him with such an overpowering sense of guilt that his brain was incapable of rational thought. The bright sunshine that streamed into his room, and the balmy air of a spring morning that breathed softly through his window, were disturbing elements to his soul. For thus doth a guilty conscience accept as its accuser the pure and undefiled attributes of God.

Presently the bells ceased ringing, and as the last notes died away, Ambrose said, "I have been wilfully true and deliberately, but unintentionally false. For many years I have for the sake of respectability, daily endured curses and insults. For many years as a reason of this I have been true in law, but false in feeling. I married, and while marriage brought me perpetual punishment, in one way it perhaps gave a character to my life that I should not otherwise have possessed. Possibly the lash was necessary, though when it was wielded ceaselessly by a weak and coarse intelligence, could it be expected to inspire a love that had never existed? And yet, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' " thought Ambrose, and here he paused. "My duty to myself lies in the path of my duty to God, and yet 'God is love,' and teaches love. Do I love Annette? Does she love me? Yes, a thousand times, yes, and if so,—we,—but no, I must never admit this truth; I must die if need be rather than admit it, even to myself," and he passed his hand over his eyes and brow, as if to brush away a vision of happiness that he had no right to gaze upon. Then he went on, "I have all my life sought for ideals, but how strange it is that even before or since my marriage I never found a woman who inspired in me more than a passing interest, until Annette came to me. Love was such an unknown quantity in my nature, that at the age of thirty-one years I abandoned all hope of ever feeling a real love for any woman and married in obedience to an impulse inspired by a regard for my personal welfare alone. The other night I placed the blame upon Mrs. Weedahl. That was wrong. She did

her part, it was true, but I was the actual offender. I can understand why I love Annette, but why does she love me? I never made the slightest effort to win her love. Physically I am very plain and unattractive. I never gave her a flower, neither did I go to her. She came to me. I loved her from the first hour that I met her. Ah, yes, my love was evident, in spite of my efforts to conceal it, and thus I unconsciously inspired affection in her. Yet," and here he frowned, "Mrs. Weedahl poisoned her mind, and noting her love for me sought through this agency to blind her sense of virtue, and how ably she can do this sort of work when she tries. My preceptors in vice in the past have never succeeded half so well as this woman, whom fate has marked for their successor. This woman, who coming into my life of misery has finished so well the work they left undone. And what part did the miserable gossips in this house play in this first act of a drama that promises to be a tragedy? I would not have sought her. I would never have created an intimacy. She would never have sought me save for business alone. I should never have discovered her idyllic nature, for our public intercourse would have rendered such a thing impossible. I should have considered her merely an amiable woman. She would have considered me perhaps a good-natured, kind-hearted man; she would have found congenial society here, and her own virtue as well as mine would have been saved. But, she was literally driven to me by a combination of circumstances that would seem to have been inspired by the powers of darkness alone. Her husband, after her ten years of devotion and sacri-

fices, for the sake of virtue, struck her down like a beast, and then the women of this house openly placed the stamp of society's approval upon his conduct by continuing the persecution that he had left unfinished.

"We are like two vases formed from clay; apart we could have floated for an indefinite time on the ocean of life, but which when forced into hard and repeated contact by the waves of evil destiny, must one or both be broken and go down to oblivion. And, thus has been forced upon me a dream of Paradise, from which I awaken only to realize a greater depth of misery. This problem is one that must be solved for me by the destiny that created it. Its solution is beyond me now."

As Ambrose went through his wife's apartment he found that she had not returned the night before, but as he knew that she frequently in thus visiting her relatives stayed over Sunday, he felt no uneasiness. As he was taking coffee and rolls in his room, a bell-boy notified him that she had 'phoned to know if he would come out to dinner, and was waiting at the 'phone for an answer. He replied that he did not care to go out, but that she should spend the day with her sister if she felt so disposed. He spent the greater part of the day in the hotel exchange, smoking and reading. Mrs. Weedahl who had been watching for him, and who had not seen him since their interview of Friday evening was very anxious to show him that "Sufferance was the badge of her tribe," and her greeting was somewhat timid, but effusive and cordial. She knew that she could not afford to quarrel with him, but her manner toward him now was one which while it

indicated some sense of guilt and shame was galling to Ambrose in the fact that it also showed a sense of her depraved power over him in the possession of his heart's secret. She seated herself beside him on a sofa and tried hard to be agreeable, but she mistook the look of repugnance that was fixed upon his face for one of anxiety, so she said, "Don't worry, Ambrose, a little flirtation will never do any harm if you are careful to tie strings to your smiles."

Annette did not appear down-stairs until evening at dinner. Ambrose waited in the exchange until he saw her enter the dining-room, and a moment later he followed her. They thus dined alone at separate tables, but a few yards apart, and were so seated that they faced each other. Annette wore an unassuming dress of black trimmed with lace of the same color and which seemed by contrast to emphasize the marble whiteness of her face in whose softened lineaments her emotions were revealed to Ambrose, as their eyes met occasionally, or which were rendered expressionless as the light of love was hidden beneath her drooping lashes. The invisible barrier to their complete and lawful happiness was none the less potent in its influence upon them, and Ambrose by a few stealthy glances about the dining-room discovered that Mrs. Brown-Jones and others had eyes only for the tables at which Annette and himself were seated. He then hurried through his dinner without again looking at Annette, and leaving the dining-room paced to and fro along a corridor near the elevator. As he thus waited in the hope of speaking to Annette, Mrs. Brown-Jones in the company of two other

ladies came along the hall. They stopped as Ambrose bowed and politely greeted them.

"Oh, judge," said Mrs. Brown-Jones, "how utterly disconsolate you look waiting here for your wife. I shall certainly express my pity for you by describing to her your doleful countenance and your evident anxiety about her, and shall warn her under penalty of my displeasure never to leave you all alone again."

Ambrose responded to this bit of crocodile gush with his most amiable smile and dulcet tones.

"It is so good of you, Mrs. Brown-Jones, to show a degree of interest in me, similar to that which you manifest toward so many others, and I assure you that I appreciate to its full value the broad range and nature of your interest in humanity. I place an equal value on the penetration you have just shown in divining the cause of my doleful face and apparent anxiety. Most women feel a pardonable pride in the knowledge that their husbands are anxious and lonely when they are absent, and I am quite sure that Mrs. Pierce will gladly learn from you that my appearance and manner have indicated this."

The three ladies then entered the elevator and went to their apartments, and a few minutes later, Annette came out. A slight shadow of fear came over her face as she saw that Ambrose was waiting for her, which was followed by a smile of pleasure, as he motioned for her to enter a small reception-room which was vacant at the time.

"I have been wishing all day that I could see you," said she, speaking quickly and with low tone and hurried breathing; "but I did not know how to

arrange it. I imagined that if I saw you openly every one would read my secret. I must leave here in the morning, and I do not want any one here, not even Mrs. Weedahl, to know where I go. The only address I shall leave for mail or callers will be your office. I must go around to the Richelieu this evening to make a payment and complete my arrangements there, so that I can go in the morning. Dare you,—can,—will you go there with me? I would ask Grill to go, only I don't want him or any one else to know, only you," she said. "I shall be known there by my maiden name, Borden, and so to all the world but you, will drop out of existence. I would not ask you to go with me, only that some one as a matter of propriety should answer for me, and you as my attorney could best do this."

Ambrose gladly agreed to accompany her, and a few minutes later they went out together.

The following morning Annette took an early breakfast in her room; then with her faithful maid she quietly left the Portland, never to return, and her name of Caldwell was lost in the gray mists of the morning, as she walked to her new home.

Several weeks then passed without incident worthy of note, save that Ambrose and Annette saw each other as often as possible, chiefly at the Richelieu, and occasionally at his office, but never elsewhere.

One afternoon in May as Ambrose returned from luncheon to his office he was informed by Adolph that sheriff Caldwell and "Bob" Wrenn, the Raleigh constable and detective, were waiting to see him. Ambrose frowned at the information thus

given by Adolph, for he realized that as Annette's decree of divorce had been granted, and as he knew the sheriff felt some animosity for him, he assumed that his call was not inspired by a desire to be sociable with him or to favor either himself or Annette. As he entered his office he found the sheriff seated by a window while Mr. Wren was standing in front of a portrait of an ancient jurist in wig and gown, apparently deeply engrossed in its contemplation. The greetings exchanged between the sheriff and Ambrose were laconic and formal, but that of "Bob" was somewhat hilarious and quite free from any evidence of ill feeling.

"I say, judge," said "Bob," "I was jest lookin' at your pictures and statuary. You've got a hull grist of it here fer sure. I always did like to look at these old fellows and have often wondered how they managed to keep their hair combed so slick. You don't mind me lookin' around, do you, judge?"

"Not at all," said Ambrose. "Don't miss anything."

This last caution was not needed, for Bob did not intend to miss anything, and Ambrose fully understood that the interest he showed in his antiquities was trifling indeed as compared with that which he felt for evidence bearing upon recent events. He felt that the nature of their business with him was not a matter that would be openly and frankly discussed, so he considered that his present duty would be to talk with the sheriff and to watch Mr. Wren. This assumption of Ambrose proved to be justified by the conduct of his callers, for Bob indifferently continued his inspection in silence, while the sheriff, the odor of whose breath polluted the air of the

room, moved his chair close to the desk and with a hang-dog manner and suspicious gaze, addressed himself to Ambrose.

"Judge, where is my wife?"

"Whom do you mean?" said Ambrose.

"You know who I mean, even if she is not my wife; I mean Annette; where is she?"

"This office is her business address, and I as her attorney am authorized to transact business for her. What do you want?"

"I want to know where she lives?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean you won't tell me."

"Exactly, I won't tell you."

The sheriff nodded his head in a rather ludicrous acquiescence, and as he shifted uneasily in his chair he seemed somewhat at loss as to what he should do next. Ambrose utterly indifferent to him had all along closely followed the movements of the restless Bob, and who now seated on a tufted leather divan, seemed to be somewhat ill at ease as he saw that Ambrose was giving him the undivided attention of his eyes. Ambrose saw Bob remove something from a leather fold of the divan, but the object was so small that it was completely concealed by his hand. He also saw Bob look down in the space between the end of the divan and a bookcase. Presently Bob sneezed and then sneezed again. He then drew from his pocket a handkerchief and blew his nose, but in replacing the handkerchief in his pocket while looking elsewhere he missed his pocket and the handkerchief fell over the end of the divan.

"Blame me, if there don't go my handkerchief,"

said Bob, and reaching down over the end of the divan he soon secured it and thrust it into his pocket, but he had secured other objects of trifling importance at the same time, and which went into his pocket along with the handkerchief. After this Bob appeared to be more or less bored by the turn that the sheriff's hunt for information was taking and opened a book which lay upon a table within easy reach. The book was a copy of Lord Byron's poems, and a book-mark and pencil notes indicated that the verses on that page were of special interest. Bob was not known in the social world as an admirer of either Byron or Browning, but no devotee at the shrine of Pegasus ever worked harder than did Bob on this occasion, in his efforts to obtain a proper conception of the verses, and which with his native shrewdness he rightly judged had some bearing upon the business he was supposed to be looking after. So while the sheriff and Ambrose continued their interview, Bob continued his perusal of the poem, which in order that the reader may properly appreciate later developments, is herewith reproduced in full.

“ In slumber, I pray thee, how is it
That souls are oft taking the air,
And paying each other a visit,
While bodies are, heaven knows where ?

“ Last night 'tis in vain to deny it,
Your soul took a fancy to roam,
For I heard her on tiptoe, so quiet,
Come and ask whether mine was at home.

“ And mine, let her in with delight,
And they laughed and they talked the time through,
For when souls come together at night,
There's no telling what they mayn't do.

“And your little soul, heaven bless her,
Had of much to complain and to say,
Of how sadly you wrong and oppress her
By keeping her prisoned all day.

“If I happen, said she, but to steal,
For a glance now and then to her eye
Or to quiet the fever, I feel,
Just to venture abroad on a sigh.

“In an instant she frightens me in,
With some phantom of prudence or terror,
For fear I should stray into sin,
Or what is still worse into error.

“Upon hearing this piteous confession,
My soul looking tenderly at her,
Said, as for grace and discretion,
He didn't know much of the matter.

“But to-morrow sweet spirit he said,
Be at home after midnight, and then,
I will come when your lady's in bed,
And we'll talk o'er the matter again.

“So she whispered a word in his ear,
(I suppose to her door to direct him)
And to-morrow at midnight my dear,
Your polite little soul may expect him.”

The sheriff and Ambrose in the meantime had continued their interview.

“Well, judge, if you don't want to tell me where Annette lives, it won't be hard for me to find out. I inquired at the Portland for her, and they said she had moved and the only address they had was your office. Now another thing, judge, I have heard that before she got her decree she came here pretty often, a little oftener than was necessary, eh, judge?”

"She never came here except when I wanted to see her," said Ambrose.

"I understand, and you wanted to see her nearly every day. You thought I would be a rather hard proposition and you didn't want to lose any chances," and the sheriff made an effort at a sarcastic smile. "But that's all right, judge, I don't care how much she comes here or how much she goes somewhere else. I want to see her on a little matter of business, and I don't propose to see her at your office."

"Then," said Ambrose, "you will perhaps see her in court."

"No, I won't see her in court either; but that is all you can know about the matter now," and then as if he felt that he possessed power enough to defy Ambrose he said, "You got your ten thousand, but you won't get the nine hundred a year."

"Well, sheriff," said Bob, who began to anticipate trouble, "I don't see much use in askin' the judge about the lady. It ain't his business to give addresses when he don't want to, and it seems to me he has hinted that he ain't entirely willing to tell us where the lady is. We had better go out meekly and submissively, and take a train for Raleigh, for I have a sort of a feelin' that the judge considers us 'nit person au gratin,' as they say down in Washington."

As Bob said this, he partly turned toward the window, but Ambrose caught the reflection of Bob's wink in the eye of the sheriff. As they were about to leave his office, Ambrose said,

"Perhaps I had better warn you, sheriff, not to molest your former wife in any way. You have no

claim whatever upon her, and any trouble you may cause her except by due process of law, must be answered for to me."

The sheriff made no reply to this, and he and Bob went out together. After they had gone, Ambrose realized that the sheriff and the wily Bob meant to cause trouble for Annette, and that as the sheriff had stated that he would not invoke the aid of the law, Ambrose could only assume that she was to be the victim of some cruel treachery at the hands of her former husband. He paced the floor of his office in deep thought for several minutes, and then said, "Yes, I must aid them in finding her, but in such a way that they will not suspect my assistance. I will be their dupe for the time being—an innocent party to the game. Bob secured some evidence while on that divan, and we will learn later on what he discovered."

Ambrose smiled broadly and then laughed out loud, as with firm decision he walked into Adolph's room, and took down the telephone receiver and called up the Richelieu.

"Is that you, Annette?"

"No, I cannot come to-day."

"Yes, I am quite well, thank you, but very busy."

"No, I cannot come to-morrow, either, but I want you to come here."

"Why, nothing particular, only to sign a paper, a formality in connection with your recent case. You had better come in about two o'clock."

"Adolph," said Ambrose, "we must protect Annette from the sheriff, so I have asked her to come here in order that Bob Wrenn may follow her

when she leaves here and find out where she lives."

Adolph was so accustomed to his master's peculiar methods of business that even though he felt that the kind of protection thus proposed was questionable, he bowed his head in prompt assent. Ambrose then continued:—

"He has employed Bob to look her up, and we shouldn't make the job too expensive for him; also if we keep them waiting for Annette to come here it will interfere with my plans and perhaps spoil them. If they don't trace Annette to the Richelieu sooner or later they will trace me there. So we will quietly help them to make a quick job of seeing her. I must ask you to do a little more detective work, Adolph, so while Bob is watching for Annette you can watch Bob, and under my direction you can take care of subsequent developments. I am greatly obliged to the sheriff for calling here to-day, and showing his hand a little, and so won't begrudge Bob any little evidence he may have obtained to help him along. Bob isn't a bad fellow at all; he simply works for the man who pays him, and we all do that more or less."

Out on the street, as they walked along, Bob and the sheriff discussed the events of their call on Ambrose.

"Well, Bob," said the sheriff, "we didn't find out very much."

"Rome wasn't built in a day, sheriff," said Bob, "and you shouldn't say 'we' because I did learn a little. I found several articles of more or less value."

"I thought I saw you pick up something on the sofa; what was it?"

"Oh! nothin' much, jest a little every-day hair-pin. The judge has a wife, you know, sheriff."

The sheriff looked at the stoical face of his companion, as he replied,—

"Yes, that's a fact, Bob, so he has."

"There were several little dried up vi'lets on the floor which I picked up when I drooped my handkerchief."

"Indeed," said the sheriff, "violets in a lawyer's office."

"Why shouldn't there be vi'lets in a lawyer's office," said Bob with a burst of indignation. "Hain't lawyers got a right to buy flowers if they wants to? Suppose a poor little boy as was tryin' to make an honest penny come up in the judge's office sellin' vi'lets, couldn't the judge spend five cents fer a bunch if he wanted to? And if courtships is called courtships 'cos they ends in court, can't a few vi'lets go along with 'em?"

The sheriff was unable to make a fitting argument in reply to this and made no attempt to do so. So he only said, "Well, Bob, you did find out something. Was there anything more?"

"Yes," said Bob, "I found this handkerchief and picked it up along with my own."

"Let me see it," said the sheriff, eagerly, and as Bob handed it over to him he examined it carefully. It was a diminutive piece of fine linen with the initials "A. B. C." embroidered in one corner. As the sheriff carefully examined the handkerchief, Bob remarked:—

"The judge has a wife, you know, sheriff."

"Yes, Bob, I know," said the sheriff, and this

time he laughed, "but the judge's wife does not have the initials 'A. B. C.' on her handkerchief."

"Mixed in the laundry," said Bob; "laundries is terrible careless sometimes," and then as he noted the doubtful smile on the sheriff's face his own took on an expression of owl-like solemnity, as he continued, "Why, sher'ff, you'd hardly believe it but one day some years ago a laundry sent me a big bundle of duds by mistake, and when I opened it I found it was the hull outfit of some fat lady. As I inspected the duds and looked 'em over, I jest roared. It made me think of the young wife up in Maine, who made her little boy his first pair of pants, and she made 'em jest as big in front as she did in the rear, an' when she showed the pants to the boy's father, he said, 'Mother, them is all right pants, but when Bobbie puts 'em on he won't know whether he's goin' to school, or comin' from school.' An' sher'ff, I'll be blamed if when I thought I'd have to wear them duds, I said, big Bobbie will know how to feel for little Bobbie. There's no use talkin', sher'ff, laundries is terrible careless."

"All right, Bob," said the sheriff, as he took the other souvenirs of their visit, and wrapping them in the handkerchief placed them carefully in his pocket. "I noticed you looking at a magazine, and also a book. What did you see in them?"

"Oh," said Bob, "I was jest lookin' at the corset and hosiery 'ads' in the magazine, but the book had a poem in it marked with a lead pencil that was quite interestin'."

"What was the name of the book?"

"Why it was called 'Bryan's Poetical Works,' but I never knew that he writ poetry before."

"What was the poem about?"

"Oh, it was about one of these slop-over guys; one of these kind that parts his hair in the middle with a bang on each side, 'cos he don't know whether nature intended him for skirts or pantaloons. Say, sher'ff," continued the garrulous Bob, "you know the doctors say that we are eighty per cent. water, and that sometimes our brains is all water. Do you believe that?"

"I don't know," said the sheriff, "why?"

"Oh, I've seen some fellers melt so when they talked to a gal, that I thought the doctors had sized 'em up that way."

"But what about the poem, Bob?"

"Well, it seems that this guy had a soul that got gay when he went to sleep and then went out and looked over the town a little, while its owner went to bed in various places, and then he told a certain gal that her soul was gay too, and there wasn't any use of her sayin' it wasent, 'cos he had heard her come around one night in her stocking feet, and ask whether his soul was at home, or whether it was his lodge night, and he said his soul was at home and he was glad to see her, and invited her to come in and then he set up the drinks, and they had a high old time, and then he said the gal's soul made quite a kick because the gal wouldn't let her loose to any extent. She said she often wanted to go out and look around, but the gal always made her go back and locked the door on her. The gal said if her soul went out without an escort she might do something foolish, and then the guy's soul said he didn't know much about good form, but he would buy a book on etekit the next day,

and then call around the next evening and post her up a little. Then the gal's soul, she gave him the real address and told him he would find the latch-key under the door-mat. That's about all there was to it," said Bob, "but you know, sher'ff, when the judge's wife calls at his office he must entertain her in some way, and maybe she likes to hear him read Bryan's poems."

"Well, Bob," said the sheriff, "I suppose you can find Annette, and I think we have got enough evidence to work on after we find her. There is no doubt in my mind, but that an intimacy exists between her and the judge, and you can watch his office for her, or follow him to where she lives."

"And then, what next?" said Bob.

"Well," said the sheriff, "Adele shall do the rest."

Bob then for the first time realized that he was to be a party to some very contemptible work, and so he made haste to express himself in such a way that the sheriff would distinctly understand just how far he could count upon his assistance.

"Now, see here, sher'ff," said he, "I will find Annette for you if I can, but when I find her, I want you to discharge me. I am willin' to do straight constable work for you, but I don't want to be mixed up in this matter with that gal of yours."

"All right, Bob, you tell me where she lives and I'll pay you off."

"I suppose you have calculated, sher'ff," said Bob, "that Annette is likely to fight a little. You know she is great on the purr, but she can scratch too. She is a woman who when she drinks champagne

wants to see the bubbles, and it ain't likely that she will let Adele fool with her."

"You are right, Bob, Annette is a sly one, and likes the bubbles, but I think that Dick, Bob and Adele will be more than a match for Ambrose, Annette and Adolph. That miserable young skunk who spotted me at the hotel and then peached on me in court looked at me as solemn as an owl to-day when he let us in. If I ever get him in a safe place, I will leave my mark on him, I promise you."

"Be sure to get the safe place first, sher'ff. He is one of these still waters that run deep."

"But what do you mean, Bob, by saying that Annette purrs? I never could see any difference between a purr and a grunt, or a roar and a chuckle. They all mean the same."

"No, they don't, sher'ff," said Bob. "There is a vasty difference 'tween 'em, a large difference. That's where you show a little too much grease on the brain, sher'ff. Your think tank is slipping cogs, and you need more 'Pollinaris and less whiskey. The difference between a purr and a grunt is like this. A purr is the noise you would make if a pretty gal took a seat beside you in a street car, and a grunt is the noise you would make if a fat colored lady did the same thing. A roar is the noise we make when a good customer pays us a big bill and then tells us a joke that ain't worth listenin' to; and a chuckle is the noise we make after he is gone. You see, sher'ff, there is a difference, and Annette's purr is a terrible winnin' one, and I think like you that the judge has felt its pacifyin' influence more or less."

"Well, Bob," said the sheriff disconsolately, "I don't care much what happens lately, and you mustn't blame me on the score of whiskey. I've lost my wife, and now Adele flirts more or less with another fellow, and I can't afford to put up the cash required for all this."

"Well, sher'ff," said Bob, "you are up against it fer a fact, but jest take a little of Bob's consolation and advice. A man's a fool who will ruin himself for any woman. If she is a angel she is too good for him. If she is a ordinary gal there is plenty more like her. If she is bad, he is lucky to get rid of her. In your case, sher'ff, you have lost a good angel, and now you are like to lose a bad angel; one was too good fer you; an' the other wasn't good enough. I would advise you to sober up; marry one of the ordinary kind, and resolve to be good."

CHAPTER IX

RELATIVE TO VISITORS WHO WERE WELCOME AND TO OTHERS WHO WERE NOT

THE sheriff arose early the next morning and as he did so, he resolved to profit in some degree by the advice that the wily Mr. Wrenn had given him after they had left the office of Ambrose on the previous afternoon, so far as it related to his inordinate use of whiskey. He realized that he had not helped his own case by the numerous "bracers" he had taken prior to calling on Ambrose, and that he had shown considerable indiscretion in talking so freely, therefore feeling that he needed a clear mind for the business he had on hand, and as he had also determined to call on Adele that morning, he omitted his usual drams and confined himself to strong coffee. He had requested Bob to report to him early that morning, but he did not intend that he should accompany him when he called on Adele. He felt that the detective had made himself very clear in regard to the nature and extent of his professional services, and he saw at once that he would not be a desirable ally in the completion of the work he had in view. He had already decided to depend upon his own wits and those of Adele, and to employ as his assistant a disreputable young fellow who eked out a precarious existence as a lawyer, but who was generally known as a legal vulture. The name of this worthy young man was Burt Stricker, and he

had also been requested by the sheriff to call at his house that morning. He arrived there a few minutes in advance of Mr. Wrenn, and when Bob saw him seated in a porch rocker, he quickly understood in a general way the meaning of his presence. He needed no introduction to Mr. Stricker, nor did he want one, and so far as he himself was concerned, was glad to note this evidence of the sheriff's intention to relieve him of a disagreeable duty. While Mr. Stricker thus waited for the sheriff, Bob went into the side yard and noticed that a stable man was hitching the sheriff's trotter to a buggy. The sheriff soon appeared, cleanly shaved and faultlessly attired.

"Hello, sher'ff," said Bob, "goin' out to call on her this morning?"

"Who do you imagine I am to call on, Bob?"

"Well, you wouldn't put on them gay duds in honor of Burt Stricker, would you?"

The sheriff laughed somewhat uneasily at this sally of Bob's, but made no reply, and Bob continued,

"I also notice that you are as bright as a daisy, and I smell cologne instead of whiskey."

"Well, Bob," said the sheriff, "I shall take your advice and let whiskey alone for a few days."

"That's right, sher'ff, you made a bad break yesterday when you called on the judge. Doctors, druggists and detectives should never drink whiskey. Take Bob's advice again, and make the few days a few years."

"Well, Bob," said the sheriff, "I want you to go in town on the next train, stay there until you find Annette, and then report to me."

"All right," said Bob; "but what are you goin' to do with Burt Stricker? You know he is a bad egg, and he might break on your hands."

"Well Bob, if you don't want to do my work, you must not question any one else whom I may employ."

At this moment Mr. Stricker appeared in the yard, and without speaking to Bob, he got into the waiting conveyance. He was quickly followed by the sheriff, who abruptly said, "good-bye" to Bob, as he rode away in the direction of Berylwood. Bob at once went to the depot and as the sheriff and his companion drove along discussing the plans the sheriff had in mind, we may briefly refer to the soiled dove who awaited their coming.

Adele Moran in appearance was not unlike the corrected description that had been made of her by Ambrose when he placed his own interpretation upon the word picture that Annette had drawn the first day she had called upon him. She was rather tall, slender and graceful. Her eyes were small and bird-like in expression, while her face was somewhat thin and sharp featured. She possessed a profusion of dark auburn hair. Her voice and manner were sharp and decisive. She was coarse, cruel and imperative, and the low cunning and deceit that by reason of necessity regulate the conduct of those who live by their wits, had stamped their degraded marks of character upon her every feature. She was a woman who would command affection rather than ask for it. She would ridicule the finer emotions, but would inspire a species of submissive animal affection in depraved minds. She had thus won and retained the sheriff's

homage. It was thus that her more forceful mind had gained the ascendancy over his. She toyed with him like a cat with a mouse. Her coarse and imperious nature under the most favorable conditions would have driven from her in horror a man of refined emotions. But the sheriff with his weak minded brutality had sunk to her moral level and submissively kissed the rod with which she ruled him.

And so, in another retrospect, by a brief summary of salient facts, we can here make a few timely comments and deductions. Two men and two women, in the persons of Ambrose and his wife, so mismated that in temperament and tastes they were as far apart as the poles of the earth, had made, what for them, could be nothing else but the fatal mistake of marriage. Their experiences, as we have so far narrated them, are common examples of every-day life. But, as a matter of proper discrimination and justice, the degree of condemnation to which each should be subjected and the meed of praise to be accorded each should here be made the subject of a brief opinion. Our hero's wife, a woman of strong mind and weak emotions, whose only faults were a bad temper and unbridled tongue; a woman of such unquestioned virtue that its strength and purity were repellent to ordinary mortals, had married a man who in the person of our hero, was perhaps in moral strength several grades lower than she; a man who, more or less careless and irresponsible by habit had married her without love, but had tried to be faithful to his marriage vows under conditions which made his failure to do this in some degree pardonable.

The unfortunate Annette had fled from a man many grades lower in moral strength than she, and had given her heart unasked to a supposedly superior being in the person of Ambrose, and here by the order of destiny it was the fate of two souls, congenial in heart and mind, and who loved each other from the first moment they met, to find that law and self-respect sternly forbade them to enjoy in honor the only love they had ever known. The sheriff, a man who in the name of business propriety assumed several virtues that he did not possess, but whose every taste and emotion at heart were those of the lower order of animals, had driven a lovely wife from him and found congenial companionship in a woman who had drained the cup of depravity to its dregs, and who by reason of the fact that she would not even assume a virtue was in moral character, many grades lower than he. So without considering this woman as a fifth party in the case, we find that of this quartette, the one who suffered the greatest wrong was our hero's wife. A wrong for which three persons were directly responsible, and the wife herself with many others indirectly so.

Our object in making these deductions is simply to prove and grade beyond question the animal instincts of mankind, without which marriage would be impossible, and for the young and innocent, to point out the breakers ahead. It would seem as a fitting lesson to be drawn from this that the vexed question as to the proper length of a courtship is in some degree answered, a broken heart is better than a ruined life, for broken hearts are always figurative diseases, never literal, and a dozen broken engage-

ments are better than a marriage which would bring a life of misery, or what is even worse, divorce.

Does not the sad predicament of our hero and Annette suggest that the danger of making mistakes in marriage should be reduced to the lowest possible minimum? Should not our affections be educated to the greatest possible extent, and should not the line of true and false modesty be sharply drawn? Should not an apparently intense and reciprocated love be considered a fever and treated as such until the dross is so consumed that it is subordinate to the mind instead of the senses? Should it not be treated as a mutually infectious disease in which marriage is employed only as a last heroic resort to effect a cure? When a man or woman tires of a courtship and breaks the engagement, it is almost invariably the best thing that could happen for both. Marriage is of course an honest duty, but it is also law, and law and duty are seldom agreeable, and how much real duty do we perform from a feeling of inclination? And how many would obey the law if they could consistently evade it? No person can accept uncongenial companionship and live in health, even though some sense of temporary relief is obtained. A tonic will relieve us of debility, but it will act as a poison if its use is persisted in. A plant may be benefited by a brief exclusion from the light, but it will die if kept in the gloom. Some natures there are who, like the edelweiss can bloom above the storm and snow, and yet retain their form and purity when removed to other climes. They appear to be the perfected creations of an Almighty Power, and whose mission on earth is to inspire hope in the hearts of erring

humanity, but also, like the little Alpine flower, pure but emotionless, to our earthly hearts they seem to have grown in the unclouded sunlight of heaven and nearest to God.

Adele lived with a woman whom she called her aunt, but who was no relation to her whatever. She had been advised that the sheriff would call on her this morning and was waiting for him on the lawn in front of the house when he arrived in company with Mr. Stricker.

"Hello, Dickey," said she, leaning over the gate as the sheriff alighted and tied his horse, and then as Mr. Stricker approached, she continued, "Who is your friend?"

"Mr. Stricker, Mrs. Moran," said the sheriff, after which introduction the trio went into the house.

"Now, Dickey bird," said Adele, tapping the sheriff playfully on the shoulder, "how about cash this morning? Mind now, I don't like this paying of nine hundred a year to a woman who is no relation to you, and when you don't even know where she lives, while I, your best friend, am left to go hungry, and I tell you right now that I don't intend to stand it much longer, and keep quiet. Do you hear, Dickey bird? I will make a noise, I tell you."

"But, Adele," said the sheriff, "you know ——"

"I don't know anything except that my board bill here is unpaid, and I am waiting for you to put up some cash."

"Well, Adele, I called on Judge Pierce yesterday, you know Judge Pierce, of course, and ——"

"Yes," said Adele with a scornful smile, "I know Ambrose only too well. Did the judge tell you to

pay me twenty thousand cash and nine hundred a year?"

"Hush, Adele, you must listen to me," said the sheriff. "I have a plan by which the nine hundred a year now being paid to Annette can just as well be paid to you."

"And did Judge Ambrose advise you to transfer this money to me? It seems to me you are talking like a fool, Dick. What do you mean, anyhow?"

"I mean," said the sheriff, "that Ambrose and Annette are evidently very much in love with each other."

"What?" said Adele. "Why, Judge Pierce in love with your divorced wife? A saint such as he; a married man in love with Annette, impossible!"

The sheriff then exhibited the souvenirs of his visit of the previous day, and narrated in detail all that had transpired, also much more that he suspected. He told her that Bob Wrenn was engaged in the work of locating Annette, and that as soon as his plans were completed he desired Adele in company with Mr. Stricker to call on Annette and force her under threat of exposure to relinquish all claims upon him. Mr. Stricker who had been well posted by the sheriff as to the part he should play remained silent during his recital, and Adele's expression of contempt for the sheriff changed to one of undisguised admiration, as she foresaw even more than he the almost certain success of his plan; so she patted him on the cheek rather affectionately, as she said:—

"Dickey, you are a birdy-bird, and your game is bound to win. Just give me five hundred in advance right now, please."

"Not to-day."

"Well, next week will do. Ambrose in love? It is too funny to think of. Surely you are wrong, Dick; there must be some mistake."

"There is no mistake, Adele. Do your part when we are ready, and the game is won."

Adele for a moment seemed absorbed in deep thought, and then a hard cruel expression came over her face. This was succeeded by one of conscious power, as she seemed to realize more fully than did the sheriff, the certainty of success. She looked upon her visitors as a despotic queen would look upon her slaves, and her voice and attitude indicated the confidence she felt as she said,—

"All right, Dick, hurry up the business; I will be ready when you are. Your scheme is a good one, but if she defies us, or resorts to a subterfuge to gain time in order to consult Ambrose——"

"I will take care of that matter," said Mr. Stricker, interrupting her. "I will have already prepared in due form a proper release for the sheriff which she must sign then and there. She will not be given time to consider or delay matters. We of course must be prepared for a remonstrance on her part, but we will demand immediate compliance under threat of immediate exposure. You see there is little doubt of a satisfactory result," and the freckled face and watery eyes of Mr. Stricker beamed with a reptilian smile.

"Well," said Adele, "I was about to say that if your scheme should fail, I can bring her to her knees with an idea of my own."

When all arrangements had been fully discussed and definitely understood, the sheriff and his worthy

companion took their departure and drove homeward; while Adele, enjoying the bright May sunshine, strolled over to Berylwood, where from the noise and bustle they were making it seemed as though a regiment of mechanics and landscape gardeners were at work, and—as this precious trio—these actors in the opening scenes of a tragedy thus temporarily leave the stage, we turn our attention to others who must now appear.

On arriving in the city, Bob secured a front room in a lodging house nearly opposite the office of Ambrose, from the window of which he could distinctly observe every one who entered or left the building. Promptly at two o'clock, Annette called on Ambrose as she had been requested to do, and as Bob saw her go in he felt that his services for the sheriff would be dispensed with that evening. As he carefully watched for Annette to leave he saw Adolph come out with a large envelope in his hand, and who without pausing or looking in any direction hurried away, and was soon lost to view around a corner. As Bob then idly continued his vigil, he began to speculate on the meaning of Adolph's apparent errand, and he chuckled softly to himself as he said, "Mebbe he sent Adolph out jest so he wouldn't be in fer a little while, or mebbe the big envelope was real business; well, I am not tryin' to ketch Adolph, so I don't care what the big envelope was for."

We may thus infer that Bob was not infallible in his deductions, otherwise he would have followed Adolph instead of waiting for Annette. A few minutes after Adolph's departure Annette appeared, and without suspecting that she was being watched, walked slowly away. Ambrose, for good reason,

had not informed her of the real facts ; first because he did not desire to worry her needlessly, and secondly because her complete innocence of danger would enable him to give her greater protection. He had only requested her to go straight home, which she had promised to do.

When Bob saw her depart, he at once hurried down-stairs and was seen by Ambrose through a closely-shaded window, as he followed Annette at a respectful distance. Annette walked to an up-town car, which she boarded, and was followed unseen by Bob, who remained on the rear platform. They thus rode up-town, and when Annette arose to leave the car, Bob immediately jumped off, and as before followed her at a distance until he saw her enter the Richelieu. After satisfying himself by inquiry of the janitor that she resided there, Bob retraced his steps and boarded a down-town car, and then Adolph, who from the window of the drug store opposite the Richelieu had carefully noted the movements of the detective, went immediately to the office of Ambrose, and informed his master of Bob's success. A prolonged consultation was then held by Ambrose and Adolph, at the termination of which, a conditional method of procedure was agreed upon, and which Ambrose supplemented that evening by calling at the Richelieu and seeing the faithful servant maid of Annette, unknown to her mistress. The plans of Ambrose to protect Annette were materially assisted, and the accuracy of his deductions thoroughly confirmed on the following morning ; for when he arrived at his office, he found the wily Mr. Wrenn awaiting him. Giving due heed to the warning cough of Adolph, Ambrose greeted Bob with a

pleasant smile, to which Bob responded by extending his hand, and then as they seated themselves, Ambrose looked at the detective inquiringly. Bob twisted uneasily in his chair and seemed at loss how to begin, but Ambrose waited for him in patient silence.

"I say, judge," said Bob, finally, "I want to ease my mind a little. I was in town yesterday and the day before on business for the sheriff, and I suppose you guessed pretty near what that business was when we called here."

"I did form an opinion," said Ambrose.

"Well, I went home last night, and this morning when I saw him he offered to pay me, but I took only my actual expenses. If I had known the game he was up to, I wouldn't have come here at all."

"Does the sheriff know where Annette lives?"

"Yes," said Bob. "I told him."

"Then," said Ambrose, "what am I to understand as a meaning of your visit this morning?"

"Well, judge, I am only a plain every-day constable, but I ain't so low that I will help to persecute a helpless woman. You are pretty good at guessin', and you can guess a whole lot when I tell you that Burt Stricker and Adele are going to call on Annette."

"How do you spell the names?" said Ambrose.

"Well, you know her name is Adele Moran, and here is Mr. Stricker's business card."

"Well," said Ambrose, "when do you think they will call?"

"Not before to-morrow at least, and perhaps not then. I don't know for sure. You understand, I suppose?"

"I think I do," said Ambrose. "I thank you for calling; perhaps later on I may say more."

"I say, judge," said Bob, as he arose to go, "I have often thought that if everybody had a proper amount of self-respect there wouldn't be any need of law or lawyers. I am glad that I am well out of this, for I feel it in my bones that the sheriff is goin' to the dogs at a two minute gait."

After Bob had gone, Ambrose sat for a long time in thought, and Adolph with much concern noted on his master's face an expression of intense sadness and dejection. Ambrose did not feel capable of facing the issue that would be involved by the exposure of his love for Annette, and he knew that she would regard such a contingency with equal dread. He did not question his own devoted love or hers, but he was not sure of either himself or Annette, if compelled to make an open choice between duty and love. They did not dare to think of the future, for in contemplating what seemed to be the inevitable end, they each felt a sense of horror as they realized the love that ruled them body and soul, and which seemed only to foreshadow a tragic ending. They were mentally and physically powerless to resist this love, and in their sacred regard for external appearances, absolute secrecy seemed necessary to the preservation of love as well as life. It can therefore be readily understood that Ambrose in protecting the interests of Annette, and in his determination to foil the evident attempt at blackmail, which the sheriff was contemplating, would spare no effort in making his own plans effective beyond the possibility of failure. He, therefore, called to Adolph and carefully instructed him

as to how he should proceed. He told him of what he had said to Annette's maid the evening previous, and that it was his desire that Annette should remain in ignorance of his intended assistance up to the last moment. Her ignorance of the entire matter was essential to a complete success for Ambrose, and utter defeat for the sheriff.

Ambrose fully realized that the sheriff by reason of his official position would not dare to appear in person in a scheme to coerce Annette, that was not only beyond the pale of law, but which in a possible exposure of him would stamp him publicly as a contemptible scoundrel. Ambrose also felt that as the sheriff had no absolute proofs of his intimacy with Annette, and as he considered that if he were present in person at the interview, Annette might in her emotions of love or fear jeopardize her own interests, he resolved to entrust the entire matter to his reliable clerk. After Adolph had received and carefully noted his instructions, he left the office of Ambrose with the understanding that he should return only when his work was finished.

Annette in the meantime, unconscious of impending evil, save that which in the intensity of her love seemed far distant, began to take a happy interest in her new mode of life. Living thus alone with her faithful maid, whose honest heart and unquestioned loyalty caused her mistress to appreciate her as a companion, as well as a servant, she felt a sense of content and peace which she had never known before. She could remember the sheriff and her ten years of cruel bondage only with a shudder of horror, and if an occasional sense of fear crept into her heart, as she thought of her new-born and hope-

less love for Ambrose ; —if this cloud for a moment obscured the sunshine of her happiness,—she felt that she had at least known the meaning of love in her own heart, and felt the happiness of being loved in return. She knew that all things earthly must come to an end. She felt that the end of her love for Ambrose meant the end of her life, and she remembered how one day when she had fearfully spoken of the possibility of being parted from him, and they had both felt the dread fear that such a thing implied, he had quoted these words from Byron :—

“ And what is death ?

’Tis a sunset,—

And mortals may be happy to resemble

The Gods but in decay.”

The following day passed without incident and on the next afternoon Annette went down-town and called on Ambrose at his office. While she was there, Ambrose answered a telephone call which proved to be from Adolph. He told Ambrose that Annette had gone out about an hour before and desired to know if she was there. Ambrose replied in the affirmative and expressed his pleasure to know that his representative was so alert. About nine o’clock that evening Adele accompanied by Mr. Stricker called at the Richelieu, and after learning that Annette was at home they went immediately to her apartments without the formality of being announced. They were admitted by the maid, and as Annette stood up to receive them an expression of horror came over her face as she recognized one of her visitors as Adele. Her callers seated

themselves while Annette remained standing, and as she supported her trembling form by holding to a chair, she looked around for her maid, who had disappeared in the adjoining room, but who returned in a moment and stood by the side of her mistress.

"I feel that we are not welcome visitors, Mrs. Caldwell," said Adele, "but we are here only on business and won't detain you long."

"State your business, please," said Annette, as she remained standing.

"Won't you please be seated, Mrs. Caldwell," said Mr. Stricker. "Also I would suggest that as our business is a matter in which I am sure you would desire utmost privacy, your maid should leave the room for a few minutes."

"My maid shall remain where she is," said Annette firmly. "She has my entire confidence and I am quite willing that she shall hear anything you may have to say."

"Very well," said Mr. Stricker, as he took from his pocket a document which he slowly unfolded. "This instrument is a release prepared in due form by the terms of which you are required to relinquish all claim to the annuity which the court ordered Sheriff Caldwell to pay to you. I would advise you to sign the same at once and without protest, as of course you are aware that in coming here as we do this evening we could not accept a refusal, and I feel you will understand that any objections you could offer would be futile and mean only needless delay."

"But I certainly shall refuse," said Annette. "What right have you to come here and make such an outrageous demand?"

"The sheriff, madam," said Mr. Stricker, "feels that the law has treated him unfairly in this matter, and that it is his moral right to evade payment if he can."

"Then," said Annette, "let him test his moral right in court, and I will meet him there. These are my apartments. Your presence here is very objectionable to me, and I command you to leave at once. Do you hear me? There is the door."

Mr. Stricker looked at Adele, as if to inquire of her whether or not they should obey the peremptory order of Annette, but he saw no evidence of weakness in the look that Adele gave him, as she herself replied to Annette's command.

"Well, Mrs. A.—Caldwell, or whatever you call yourself, you are a fine lady bird to defy us; to order us to leave. How dare you pose as a picture of injured innocence, when you have committed exactly the same offense against your lawyer's wife that I committed against you. Do you demand proofs of what I say? You know that Judge Pierce alone until now, has known your present place of abode. You know that he visits you here. You know that while at the Portland, you visited his office every day. Did he read you Byron's poems? Did your soul visit his at night, and did you ever go with it, and did you leave these souvenirs of your visits there? These crushed violets scattered about the floor? This handkerchief behind the divan with your initials, A. B. C. embroidered in the corner? Tell me, Mrs. Caldwell, shall I take these relics and present them to your lawyer's wife or will you escape the reckoning

that would surely follow such action by me, by signing that release immediately?"

As Adele uttered these words the pallor of Annette's face was the only indication of the effect that this denunciation had produced upon her. She remained standing, her bloodless hands still grasping for support the back of her chair. She felt her strength failing her, but she realized that Adele was not in the possession of convicting proofs, and in spite of what she knew, Annette after a moment's thought resolved to defy her.

"I will not consent to your demands," she said, and then turning to Mr. Stricker, "you, sir, I suppose, are a lawyer. I have seen you before, but I do not know your name. You know that this is an unmanly, cowardly method of doing business. You come here at night, secretly. You give me no chance to consult a lawyer or to defend myself. Your methods alone are proof of your dishonesty, and of the fact that your cause will not bear the light of day, and has no claim whatever upon justice." Then turning upon Adele, "As for you, madam, your so called proofs amount to nothing, and even if they did, I would still refuse your demand. I will become an outcast like yourself if need be, but Judge Pierce shall never be told that you intimidated me by a threatened exposure of my morality."

"Then," said Adele, as she came toward Annette, "I will not only go to the wife, but I will go to Ambrose as well. I shall not only furnish the proofs of guilt, but I shall tell them both," and here she whispered in the ear of Annette words that

caused a visible expression of horror to appear upon her face.

"It is false; it is impossible," said Annette, as she grasped the arm of Adele and placed her so the light shone full on her face.

"It is quite true, madam," said Adele; "you ought to love me more than you do."

Annette hesitated for a moment and then said, "Come here to-morrow at noon; come alone, and you shall see me alone. Prove what you say is true, and I will buy your silence at the price you demand. I will sacrifice the annuity for his sake, but not for my own."

"We cannot wait until to-morrow," said Mr. Stricker, "but if you desire, you might have all the time needful for a private interview now in the adjoining room."

At this moment the communicating door leading into the next room was pushed open wide, as Adolph and a clean shaven muscular looking gentleman entered the parlor.

"Oh, Adolph!" said Annette, as she grasped his arm. "How, why, are you here? What does all this mean? It is so terrible. Are you here to help me? Tell me?"

"I certainly would not be here for any other purpose," said Adolph. "Sit down, Mr. Stricker," said he, as Mr. Stricker arose and looked longingly at the door leading to the hall. "It is not polite to leave so soon after we arrive. I am here, Mrs. Caldwell, by the order of Judge Pierce. In the room adjoining, I have heard all that was said, and I cannot consent for you to sign that release under any conditions."

"But, Adolph," said Annette, "come here a moment," and taking him aside she told him of what Adele had whispered to her.

"That will not make the slightest difference," said Adolph. "Judge Pierce, and I know him so well, would never let her come between him and justice, and let me assure you, Mrs. Caldwell, that he has surmised with perfect accuracy just what these people would do and has provided for your complete protection."

"Well," said Mr. Stricker, as he felt his serious predicament and determined upon an attempt at evasion, "I suppose we shall not be able to settle this matter amicably, and will have to contest it in court."

"You know very well that you have no case whatever to take to court," said Adolph, "and knowing your intelligence, I am surprised to find you engaged in a business of this kind. You are lawyer enough to know that by the laws of this state, blackmail and the obtaining of money under false pretense are synonymous crimes, punishable by fine and imprisonment at hard labor for a period not exceeding five years. Now I have here duly prepared a confession which you and Mrs. Moran must both sign. This confession, in substance recites, that you acknowledge this to be an attempt at blackmail; that the charges you have made against Judge Pierce and this lady are false, and that you recognize yourselves as amenable to the law at any time in the future should you fail to strictly observe the terms of this confession. If you are willing to sign this right now, you will be permitted to go free. If not, I have a warrant here for the arrest of

you both, and this gentleman, Mr. Mershon, a detective of this city, will take you in his charge."

"This warrant," said Mr. Mershon, "was issued to me conditionally, at the request of Judge Pierce with the understanding that I should serve same only after I had fully satisfied myself that the circumstances would justify me in arresting Adele Moran and Burton Stricker for attempted blackmail. Upon the strength of the evidence I have, I shall make the arrest unless I am instructed by this gentleman not to do so."

"You can have just five minutes in which to sign this confession," said Adolph, "that will be just two and one-half minutes for each of you," and he pulled out his watch.

Adele silently arose and stepping to the table promptly signed the confession. Mr. Stricker remained seated, staring in a dazed sort of way at Adele.

"Sign it, fool," said she, upon which Stricker sprang from his chair as though shot from a catapult and did as he was told.

"Now, Mr. Mershon, you and I will witness these signatures, if you please," said Adolph, after which formality he folded the confession and placed it in his pocket.

"Well," said Adele, "I suppose we may go?"

"Yes," said Adolph, "only return to us the handkerchief belonging to Mrs. Caldwell. Thank you. I am sorry that in returning it you had so much trouble in locating the owner."

"Now, I can breathe again, Adolph," said Annette, after her visitors were gone; "but are you sure they won't work for revenge?"

“What if they do?” said he. “Their fangs are drawn.”

“But how did you get here at such a timely moment?”

“Why,” said Adolph, “we have been here for the past two days. We were housekeeping in the vacant suite across the hall, and you supplied us with coffee and rolls which your maid kindly brought to us.”

CHAPTER X

THE SHERIFF IS ENLIGHTENED AND AMBROSE IS ENTERTAINED

THE violets of April and the blossoms of May were in turn followed by the roses of June. Nothing further had occurred to mar the happiness of Ambrose and Annette, or to reveal to the world their secret love. At the earnest request of Annette and after a thorough discussion of the matter with her, Adolph had consented to tell his master all about the results of his successful efforts in thwarting the schemes of their enemies with the exception of one or two important details. He had considered that no useful purpose could be served by imparting to him the startling information which Adele had given them on that evening, and the secret of her identity would perhaps have forever remained a secret, but for a fateful turn of that "Destiny which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will." The sheriff, awed into silence by the unprejudiced account which Mr. Stricker had given him of his unsuccessful call upon Annette and fearful of an exposure which would seriously damage his business and political interests, had wisely determined that it was time for him to be quietly discreet and also while exercising this influence upon Adele, he secretly decided that a continued intimacy with her was both dangerous and expensive, and that he had better get rid of her as

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soon as possible. He felt that Adele and Mr. Stricker had been very fortunate in getting off so easily, and that their escape from arrest and imprisonment had permitted him to crawl out through a very small hole. In thinking over the practicability of various schemes to get rid of Adele, he realized that the task was like going to the penitentiary, easy to get in, but hard to get out. He had committed himself in so many ways by appearing with her in public and by the love letters he had written her, that he was securely entangled in the meshes of Cupid's net, and felt that escape by any road meant either a loss of considerable cash or of social standing, and perhaps both. In the divorce of his wife he had suffered a severe financial loss, and his well known habits of dissipation in connection with this had in spite of his political prominence and moderate wealth, rendered his social standing in the community so precarious that he dreaded most intensely the jar that would result from a rupture with Adele. The sheriff therefore pondered deeply, but hopelessly, and it is no reflection upon his intelligence to say this. Many bright men before his time had faced similar troubles with a similar degree of embarrassment.

There was one thought, however, that was uppermost in the sheriff's mind. He felt that he ought to be encouraged in his desire to reform. He didn't expect Adele to offer him encouragement, but he thought that other people should. He had no desire to take an interested public into his confidence, and in fact he felt that there was no necessity for them to know the real state of his feelings. His silent and unexpressed assumption of the virtue

of penitence for sin was in his opinion enough for the morbid curiosity of those who would under any circumstances secretly laugh at him, and the sincerity of whose advice would be as questionable as its wisdom. In his shrewdness as a business man and a successful political schemer he wondered why he should find the solution of his present difficulty a source of so much anxiety and worryment. He worried so much over the matter that he began to show signs of impaired health, and looked pale and careworn. His friends, mostly his political adherents, who gratefully accepted the crumbs that fell from his official table, pitied him, but they were the satellites whose sympathetic and weak effulgence was but the reflected light of an ill boding star. The sheriff groaned in voice and spirit and went to church three times a day on Sunday, for, "When the devil was sick the devil a monk would be, but when the devil was well the devil a monk was he." His pitiable appearance and assumption of piety at length produced in some degree the effect he desired, for it became noised around that the sheriff was now a sober man and was greatly grieved over his wife's suit for divorce, but while this opinion gained ground with the public at large it did not find lodgement in the minds of a few persons who were familiar with the real facts. The sheriff at his wit's end finally decided to confide his troubles to Bob Wrenn, and to ask his advice. He felt that Bob was both honest and wise and that if on a previous occasion he had refused to help him do wrong, he certainly would not refuse to help him back to respectability. Bob had by judicious "pumping" and "jollyng" obtained from Mr.

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Stricker the main facts and result of the abortive attempt to coerce Annette, and so when the sheriff confided to him his intention to cast off Adele and to lead a better life, Bob's stoical face was a picture of interested sympathy, while his heart and mind were a court of justice in which the sheriff would get what he deserved, and from whose decisions there would be no appeal, at least so far as Bob's opinions and advice were concerned.

"Now, Bob," said the sheriff, "Adele is pushing me hard for money, and I am tired of the whole business and want to swear off on both women and wine. You are a very clever fellow, and now that you know all, I want you to tell me what I ought to do."

"Well, sher'ff," said Bob, "when a man has the women and wine habits as bad as you've got 'em, it seems to me that when you ask a plain every-day town constable to fix up a dose that will bring you around all smilin' you are askin' a question which is a little beyond his knowledge of drugs or surgery. If your case wasn't in such advanced stages; if it wasn't so blamed chronic, I might give you a little cheap advice that would help matters considerable, but you've about got to the stage of dissolute, and I'm afraid you'll have to take a little public disinfectin.' When you swear off on the wine habit after it has a grip on you, you will get a severe case of nervous shakes and nothing more, but when you swear off on a woman who has got a grip on you, you will not only get the nervous shakes but a whole lot of gilt-edged hell along with it."

"But Bob, I was not to blame for Adele's going wrong."

“ Not exactly, sher’ff, but she isn’t any better for knowing you, and if you didn’t cause her downfall how about your wife? You couldn’t even defend your divorce suit and why? Because you had no defense to make. You knocked her down and drove her from you after you had solemnly promised to protect her. For ten years she was a faithful, honest wife to you when you were anything else but an honest husband. If she isn’t honest, now, how much are you to blame for her failure to be honest? And now, as high sheriff of Prescott County, you are trying to make a cheap squeal on a girl whose only crime against you is that she has given you all that a woman can give; a woman who is a sinner because men like you made her so, and who, when all the world turns her down and she claims from the men who degraded her the right to live, like a mean, miserable coward, you would leave her to starve. Let me tell you, sher’ff, that you ought to be in a better business. You are pretty near the end of your rope, and your case is one that Bob Wrenn can’t prescribe for. You need a good allopath specialist or a horse doctor, and I don’t know which would be best. The man who sat in his office and beat you with his eyes blindfolded, in your little game at the Richelieu might show you a way out of your trouble, but I don’t think you want to ask advice from the judge, and I don’t think he would take your case anyhow. Men are supposed to protect women, and you as sheriff of Prescott County are supposed to set some example of how it’s done. We look to you to defend virtue and punish crime, and how have you done it? You ought to be the best citizen of Raleigh; and every-

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body knows you are the worst. Excuse me, sher'ff, for my plain talk, but I can't tell you how to get rid of a woman you have wronged, unless you pay a fair price or marry her, and, in my opinion, you will have to stand for a little more trouble in getting rid of Adele than you did in getting rid of your wife. It may not be a matter of so much cash, but it will be a matter of more brimstone for sure."

Bob's words proved to be more than true, for Adele, knowing the sheriff to be eligible as a husband, had considered him her captive, but when like a coward he sent her a brief note in which he announced that their intimacy was at an end, she called on him, and after repeated efforts to change his determination, she sacrificed her last sense of delicacy and pride, and, in a final tongue lashing which she gave him at his office, she more than proved the truth of the old adage that "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," and as she thus fell to the lowest depths a woman can reach, an acknowledged public outcast, she dragged the sheriff down with her. In thus terminating a divorce suit and liason, the sheriff alienated the respect of the public and the regard of his only remaining friends.

At the Portland in the meantime, and also at Berylwood, our friend, Mrs. Weedahl, was a very busy woman. In dividing her time between her numerous business interests in town and also giving attention to the details of preparing her mansion and grounds at Berylwood for the fête she had in contemplation, the blonde Jewess showed a most wonderful executive ability, and an artistic taste which on the surface seemed wholly inconsistent

with her coarse and vulgar nature. But Mrs. Weedahl, as the reader has doubtless inferred, was a woman who while she was wilfully and carelessly coarse and unrefined, possessed intelligence and a strong sense of appreciation for the romantic and ideal. Her unattractive personality, of which she was keenly sensitive, was emphasized by her intentional coarseness, and she repressed a disposition to be affable and courteous in manner in, we might say, a spirit of retaliation toward those who wilfully maligned her, and refused to credit her with any other accomplishment save the ability of a Jew to make money. One day when Ambrose had told her of how a certain man had needlessly condemned her by the expression of a malicious opinion as to her business methods, she had said, "He will find to his cost that I am just what he thinks I am," and she then added, "Ambrose, justify to the world by your deeds the reputation it gives you. If a man says you are honest and confides in your honesty, never be false to him. If he says you are a sinner and tries to do you, be a sinner and do him if you can."

In the daily life of Mrs. Weedahl, the absolute suppression of her ideal and romantic longings in obedience to an erroneous but tacitly accepted theory by those who knew her best that she should not be credited with an emotional nature, had made her apparently a recluse, but she thus became purse proud; and realizing that by reason of her muscular frame and huge proportions, in connection with her age and the repulsive expression of her face, she was not expected to be emotional or to show any sense of fine feeling, she secretly nursed

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the flame of resentment this occasioned until her thoughts and desires found vent in her expressed determination to surprise everybody by a fête at Berylwood in which no expense should be spared, and where the society that spurned her companionship should bow the knee to her gold if not to her, and so alone in her private office one evening at a late hour as she anticipated the completion of her plans and saw in imagination the perfected details of a summer night dream of beauty, she exultingly thought of how she alone, a supposed ogress, would design and create a veritable fairy-land, whose elves, gnomes, goblins and fairies would, as obedient vassals, appear and disappear at the wave of her golden wand.

For many weeks she had daily consulted and employed the best electrical experts, landscape gardeners, florists, artists in scenic effects, musicians, drapers and upholsterers. She had employed a renowned caterer whose instructions were to make her banquet room and menu a gastronomic poem; whose beauty should appeal to every sense of luxury, and satiate every desire. While the details of this work were executed by her hired lieutenants, she herself timed and arranged the effects desired, and so the grande ensemble bore the stamp of her master mind and the inventive genius of her vivid imagination.

The next evening in talking over matters with her legal adviser, she said:

“Ambrose, I must go out to Berylwood to-morrow and shall stay there for several days. I should like you to go with me if you can arrange to do so. I want to show you what I have done and will do,

and see if you can make any suggestions in addition to those you have already offered. Could you stay there over night? I hope you can, for the electricians will exhibit their work."

"I should be very glad to go," said Ambrose. "I can remain over night and return to town early in the morning. By the way, I see that the society columns of the newspapers are full of your intended display. You are getting a great social advertising."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the Jewess, "reporters have almost worried the life out of me lately."

"How about the invited guests? The acceptances?"

"Acceptances? Look on that table in the corner. You see they are two feet deep. Society will be there, Ambrose, in full bib and tucker. Don't worry about that. I am even deluged with requests for invitations from people I never heard of. Why, at the request of your friend, Judge Morris, I sent an invitation to a Russian duke, who happens to be in town,—his name? Oh, Lordy, don't ask me. Here is his card—Leo Cowscoff Catapussi-Ratamouski—a sort of progressive animal name. The judge says he is an awfully nice fellow, but can't talk English very well. I'll get my protégé, Kourtomsky, to talk to him. He is a Russian Jew, that I financed in rags and old iron, but I'll have to watch Tom to see that he don't steal the duke's watch."

"I suppose of course that the guests of the Portland will be invited," said Ambrose.

"Oh, yes, yes, they'll all go. Grill is going to take the linen room girl, and I believe Mrs. Brown-Jones thought I was so kind in inviting them."

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“Then you have not been exclusive in making up your invitation list?”

“Not at all; I want my friends to come because I shall truly enjoy having them there. I want my enemies to come that I may witness their humiliation and fawning hypocrisy. I want ‘soaked peas, rags and old iron,’ and many of my other financed protégés to come that they may witness my exhibition of wealth, and thus be awed unto a fear that they would be crushed out of existence if they proved false to me. I have invited the sheriff and other politicians of Raleigh, and also many prominent political officials from this city, but I felt that in doing this it would be absolutely necessary to offset the bad moral effect that they would produce, so I invited an equal number of prominent clergymen. I am afraid my invitations to the cloth will prove a little expensive, as a number of them have already reciprocated my courtesy by sending me invitations to endow homes, put new roofs on churches, donations of cash, etc. The politicians will be expensive because of the wine they will drink, and the clergymen will take cash for useful purposes, and so I pay my tax on vice and virtue at one and the same time. Thus you see, Ambrose, my motives are,—and I don’t mind telling you, for you are the only man living that I treat with such confidence,—you know you always did have too much conscience.—My motives are pride, revenge, ambition and social advertising. I don’t believe that even you thought I was capable of such a combination of concentrated emotion, but you will see. It’s going to be a stunner, Ambrose, I tell you, it’ll be a stunner.”

"I understand," said Ambrose, "Claude Melnotte's description of his imaginary palace at Como will not even apply."

"Where the perfumed light steals through the mist of alabaster lamps, and every air is heavy with the sighs of orange blossoms."

"But you are wrong, Mrs. Weedahl, in thinking I did not credit you with an emotional nature. I have for years noted that your emotions were suppressed, like my own. You understand me, and you showed your keen perception the night that I confessed my love for Annette. Your intuition penetrated my guise of quiet indifference, but in revealing this knowledge to me you plainly showed that such intuition could be born only of an emotional nature, whose senses were thoroughly attuned to mine. I pity you and myself as well, for natures like ours, which fain would quaff in supreme bliss the nectar of the gods, must drink to the end the bitter waters of Lethe."

The red eyes of the Jewess beamed softly on Ambrose, as she said:—

"Ambrose, I now understand why I have always liked you, and you are so sensible that you won't mind my saying this. You are not fooled by flattery any more than I am. Let me tell you something more, Ambrose. When I told Annette that I did not see how she could help loving a man like you, I meant just what I said. There are no secrets between you and me and no deception. Such things are impossible, but at heart you are a better man than I am a woman, and you always will be so. Let's shake hands, Ambrose, and say good-night."

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On the following morning, Mrs. Weedahl with Ambrose took an early train for Raleigh, and as they rode along, Mrs. Weedahl said, "Ambrose, I would like very much to have Annette come and visit me for a week or two, and stay with me until after the fête. I am going out to Berylwood next Monday to stay for the summer. I want to be there at least a week before we have the party, and I should enjoy having Annette there very much; of course you mustn't come near the place while she is there," and she winked mischievously, "but you can talk to her by 'phone. Will you invite her for me?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Why, yes, I certainly will," said Ambrose.

On arriving at Raleigh, they found a handsome equipage awaiting them. A team of beautiful spirited horses and a coachman in smart livery.

"This is my new turnout, Ambrose," said Mrs. Weedahl; "everything is new, even the coachman. I don't just like the man. He is a half white negro, and I am always afraid of half-breeds. They are generally dangerous, but I took him for his style and because he understands horses."

Ambrose looked at the man who was busily engaged in controlling the restive team.

"We cannot expect a half-breed negro to be a safe or reliable man, when we consider his origin," said Ambrose.

"No," said Mrs. Weedahl, "Grill says that in the hotel business they are always making trouble with razors and guns."

They then entered the carriage and were driven

rapidly out to Berylwood. As they drove past the house where Adele lived, Mrs. Weedahl saw her gazing from a window and with a motion of her hand she diverted the attention of Ambrose toward her own palatial residence.

"Look, Ambrose," said she, "here is where we get the best view of my house from the open. You see it is an up grade all the way from the station and the illumination of the grounds, house and groves will be visible all the way here."

Berylwood, on the crest of a broad hill with a beautiful park surrounding it had been for many previous generations the home of a decayed aristocracy and the property had finally fallen into the possession of Mrs. Weedahl, who appreciating the fact that it could be made an ideal summer residence as well as a suitable abode for her old age, had most elaborately and thoroughly modernized the place. The house, originally a lofty and imposing structure of stone, had been rebuilt and enlarged to nearly three times its former capacity, and in addition to this the lawns and park had been perfected by expert landscape gardeners. Countless pieces of classic and mythological statuary, with marble fountains made the open landscape a picture of rare beauty, while natural depressions throughout the park had been converted into glens, grottos and miniature lakes, where the dense foliage of bowers of creeping vines and great plants with dragons and hydra-headed monsters of stone and iron seemed fitting abodes for the elves and fairies of whom the Ogress was queen.

Mrs. Weedahl and Ambrose spent the morning in looking over the house and grounds, and Am-

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brose was thoroughly surprised at the artistic elegance of the interior of the mansion and the lavish expenditure of money that Mrs. Weedhal had made. The preparations for the fête were nearly completed, and with the exception of a few men engaged in making the finishing touches, the greater number of artisans had given place to a retinue of servants, who were busily engaged in putting the vast establishment in order for its mistress.

"Does it please you, Ambrose?" said Mrs. Weedahl, as Ambrose seated himself on a stage at the end of the magnificently decorated ball-room that he might the better feast his eyes upon the beautiful effects of draping and colors, and saw how it would appear when illuminated for the dance.

"Yes, Mrs. Weedahl," said Ambrose quietly, "it is very beautiful; far beyond my expectations, and yet I should not be surprised, I should have been prepared to see beauty such as I never saw before, for wealth alone depending upon the dull intellect of artisans could not design or perfect an ensemble like this. You alone with your wealth, your intellect, your imagination and perfected senses could do it."

After luncheon, when Mrs. Weedahl found it necessary to spend some time with the artisans, who were waiting to see her, Ambrose lighted a cigar and started out for a stroll and prolonged inspection of the park. He wandered slowly through the winding paths and after an hour or more he found that he had reached the end of the estate, and seating himself on a rustic bench, he thus remained for some time gazing out over the fields beyond. The

scene that he gazed upon was one of but ordinary pastoral beauty, but in idle meditation he carefully noted its every feature. A herd of cattle were grazing in a distant field and he could hear the tinkle of their bells. Rows of trees and fences marked the divisions of land. He could see here and there the dark shades of fields of corn and the pale green of wheat. From the chimney of a tumble down farmhouse he could see a dark column of smoke which went straight up and high in the still summer air. Over all this panorama of lazy country life the moving cloud shadows cast their ever changing tints of light and shade.

As Ambrose sat thus idly gazing, his thoughts seemed to revert in a most natural way to the incubus of guilt and misery to which he was ever a prey when alone, and the scene of peace and content that he had been looking upon, served but to augment the dejection and horror he felt. He removed his hat, and passing his hand over his eyes, he started, as he heard the sound of footsteps and the rustle of a woman's skirt behind him. He arose and stood face to face with the woman who thus appeared.

"Ruth! my sister!" was all he could say.

"Yes, brother," said the woman, sadly, "this is Ruth, your only sister. We do not meet by chance, for I have sought you. I saw you pass the house where I live this morning in the carriage with Mrs. Weedahl, and the desire to meet you, which I have felt for a long time, became irresistible."

Ambrose stood gazing upon his sister with the most conflicting emotions. His only greeting was a continued stare, and the expression of his face was

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that of grief and consternation. He stood as if rooted to the ground, as he noted the repulsive depravity that was stamped in every lineament of her face. Her eyes were red from weeping. Her dress was worn and frayed, and her luxuriant auburn hair, ever the crowning glory of a woman's beauty, fell in uncared for, disheveled masses about her thin and tear-stained face. As she thus saw Ambrose gazing silently upon her, a brother who apparently had no kind word to offer to an only sister, she burst into a flood of tears, and threw herself upon the rustic bench, sobbing with a grief that only a penitent woman who has fallen to the lowest depths can feel. Ambrose seated himself beside her and placing his arm about her waist, his tears fell to the ground with hers. As Ruth felt the gentle pressure of her brother's arm, her tears flowed afresh and her slender form shook with her sobs as she moaned, "Ambrose, I am sorry. God knows I am."

Ambrose at once divined the truth that his wayward sister had reached that depth of depravity where continued sin inspires horror and dies of the bread on which it feeds. He quickly realized that her grief was sincere and was born of that misery which comes to outcast women when all the world scorns and rejects them. He felt that her grief was a crisis in her morality, where like a crisis in disease, she would either live or die, and so he tenderly caressed her, as she thus wept beside him. Let us ever hope and feel that through such tears of penitence, our sins are washed away and forgiven by a merciful God.

Presently the violent grief of Ruth wore itself out, and as she became more composed, she looked

up at her brother and saw only compassion and love in the look that he gave her.

"Oh, Ambrose! don't look at me so. I cannot bear it, though I hoped you would not curse me. See, I am a fallen woman, the lowest of the low, a vile thing, an object to be scorned and despised by all the world."

"But Ruth, my poor wretched sister, why, how are you here? I cannot understand. Tell me all and let me help you."

"Dear brother, I did not come to you for help, but to be forgiven. I have asked forgiveness of God and now I ask for yours, and promise you, as I have promised Him that come what will, I will die rather than return to the life of sin I have led."

Ruth then narrated to him the life she had led since, when a girl of nineteen, she had repudiated her brother and how she had married and ran away from her husband. She told how she had watched her brother's career as a lawyer, and a legislator. How she had read of his prominence in the newspapers. She had also read of his appointment as a judge, and she said, "Ambrose, I have always remembered the storm of criticism to which you were subjected for your mercy to the outcast girls who were arrested and brought before you, and you demanded the men who were responsible for their dishonor. I thought that if God, as a Merciful Judge, would forgive me, my brother, also a merciful judge, would do the same."

Ambrose sat apparently staring into vacancy, and his only answer was to draw his sister more closely to his side.

"You of course understand, Ambrose, that after I

ran away from the man I married, I took an assumed name by which I have been known ever since."

Again Ambrose inclined his head in silent assent.

"I am known as Adele Moran."

Ambrose leaped to his feet, as if electrified by the words she uttered, and Ruth, misinterpreting the look upon his face, gazed at him imploringly, as the tears again rushed from her eyes.

"Don't curse me now, Ambrose. Don't curse me now. I will go away and you shall never see or hear from me again, only be kind to me now; remember me only as your baby sister, and the time that you nursed me and put all my dolls in the crib. Forget the poor wretch who now begs for one word of honest love, for her brother's forgiveness, but don't curse me, don't curse me."

"I curse you?—poor sister,—never. I forgive you and love you. But the sheriff, my sister,—Annette—I—oh misery, misery. The hand of God is beginning to point the way, for His retribution is coming home."

"Oh, Ambrose! Do you really forgive me, and love me?" said Ruth, as she arose and stood trembling before her brother.

For answer, Ambrose clasped her frail form in his arms in a prolonged embrace and kissed her, as he said, "You shall never leave me again, Ruth. My home shall be yours, and I will help you and protect you."

"No, Ambrose, dear, not now. Let me work and earn my living, and when I look like a decent woman, I will come where you are and be your sis-

ter again. I will always let you know where I am, and perhaps I may come to your office, or you may come and see me. But you are not happy, Ambrose. Do you love your wife?"

"Yes."

"But you love Annette more."

Ambrose did not reply.

"But you do not know how much Annette loves you."

Ruth then related in detail the call she had made upon Annette in company with Stricker, and gave the additional facts which Adolph had failed to mention.

"She fought us bravely," said Ruth. "She knew we had no convicting proofs of her intimacy with you, and was willing that her own reputation should be sacrificed, but when I told her, and she felt convinced that I was your sister, she would have given up the annuity and every dollar she had in the world, rather than that I as your depraved sister should publicly disgrace you. You see, brother, if a woman ever did love a man, Annette loves you."

As Ruth thus narrated to her brother the sacrifice for love that Annette would have made, he leaned forward in despair, as he realized that under certain conditions a woman's pure love for man could be to him a source of the greatest joy, or the greatest grief.

Ambrose and his sister then talked and planned as to what should be done for her, and it was finally decided that she should remain with the old woman with whom she was boarding until she could prepare a simple wardrobe with money which

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Ambrose offered to give her, and to present a general appearance of respectability; after which it was agreed that her brother would secure some respectable work for her to do in town, and to otherwise aid and protect her. Ambrose then walked over with her to the house where she was boarding, paid up her indebtedness there, and left her with the understanding that she should go to the city with him on the following day to purchase some needed dress goods. Ambrose then returned to Berylwood and found Mrs. Weedahl awaiting him with some anxiety.

"My goodness, Ambrose, where have you been all this time?" said she, as she met him on the lawn. "Our dinner is waiting."

"I am very sorry I kept you waiting," said Ambrose, "but you must forgive me. I have spent the afternoon with my sister."

CHAPTER XI

THE UNBIDDEN GUESTS

THE evening of the fête had arrived, and Berylwood was aglow with life and beauty. The early summer charms of a delightful temperature and a cloudless sky seemed but natural accessories to the elaborate and ideal entertainment which the Jewess had planned. At sunset an imposing line of carriages had assembled at the station, and soon after the special trains bearing crowds of guests began to arrive. They were quickly conveyed to Berylwood, and then the carriages returning brought others, who arrived on later trains. The mansion, brilliantly illuminated in every window and tower could distinctly be seen from the station and as the guests ascended the hill, the spacious lawns, fountains and statuary with a background of stately green trees were subjected to a unique and beautiful display of calcium effects, whose ever changing colors thus thrown upon a vast paradise of nature beautified by art produced a sense of mystified enchantment in those who looked upon the lovely scene. In the background, among the broad acres of woodland that constituted the park were myriads of miniature incandescent electric lamps in colors of blue and red. Every tree thus seemed to be bearing its fruit of stars, and which were apparently as countless and even more beautiful than those in the sky

above. Every glen and grotto was illuminated with the soft glow of these twinkling beauties, and when their pale effulgence thus thickly dotting the semi-gloom of a broad area of shade was made the background of the brilliant calcium colors in the open park beyond, it was indeed a veritable fairy-land that the Ogress had designed and created. The inspiring music of a band stationed in a pavilion, alternated with the distant melody of a trombone quartette, and the response of buglers whose far away notes died on the still night air seemed like "horns of Elfin faintly blowing." Amid these scenes of enchanted woodland beauty the guests of the Ogress strolled in delighted surprise. At every turn some visions of elfin wonderland met their gaze. A hundred or more little children, masked and clothed in bespangled costumes as veritable goblins and fairies ran and played among the trees and desported in the glens where the waters of a brook converted into miniature cascades fell to the muffled sound of tinkling music. A realistic and yet ideal rendition of "Le Jet D'Eau."

Further on in a ravine so densely shaded by spruce and fir-trees, that it was apparently a cave, were seen huge Japanese lanterns shaped into hideous and grotesque looking monsters, squatting on the ground, and whose red eyes of fire and grinning jowls seemed to be contemplating their recent prey in the skeletons illumined with phosphorus which lay scattered about the entrance to the cavern.

Throughout the interior of the mansion the fragrance of roses was everywhere perceptible, and huge banks of waving palms, which served as settings for masses of flowering plants in recess and

alcove, were visible in lavish profusion. In the furnishing and draperies the colors of red and green predominated, and the electric light effects were in harmony with these colors. In the rear the great open windows of the ball and banquet rooms looked out upon the thousands of miniature incandescent lamps whose twinkling beauty so near at hand inspired in the imagination a feeling that the stars, envious of the transcendent beauty of an art that had eclipsed their brilliancy, had assembled in the park of Berylwood in a modest protest against this successful imitation of their celestial glory. Strains of orchestral music, the source of which could not be located, greeted the ear; so soft and low that they might have been the sighs of roses, or æolean harps that the soft breezes made of the trembling palms. The senses appealed to and thus satisfied by this combined perfection of art and nature were softened and subdued. The guests moved through the spacious rooms and corridors in quiet ecstasy. They felt that this magnificence was beyond them; that they were unworthy of the honors thus accorded them, and this was exactly the impression that the Jewess desired to create by the work she had done. The reception parlor in which Mrs. Weedahl was to extend a greeting to her guests was a large octagon shaped room, the ceiling of which was an arched dome upon which an artist had painted in subdued colors an ideal reproduction of the allegorical subject, "Love's Awakening." The general effect was ecru, but on the panels which marked the eight divisions of the room, and extending from floor to ceiling were banks of huge white lilies thinly veiled by asparagus vine and

delicate ferns. The stamens of the lilies were miniature electric lamps of gilded glass, and were sufficiently numerous to light the room with their mellow golden glow. This combination of ecru, gold, pale green and white with the incandescent stars beyond showing through the gloom at each open window constituted a color scheme in which decorative art had reached the limit of human skill.

Mrs. Weedahl presently appeared accompanied by Annette. Both ladies were gowned in elaborate creations of the dressmaker's art. But the lovely white shoulders, the pale face, the red lips and sparkling eyes of Annette had never before appeared so beautiful, as when thus shown in contrast with those of her hostess. Annette so supremely happy that she was radiantly beautiful, had charmed Mrs. Weedahl to such an extent that when she announced herself as ready to accompany her to the reception parlor, her hostess had said, as she kissed her, "Annette, you are the loveliest, most charming woman that lives. How I pity your unfortunate love." Upon which Annette had realized that on that evening she must look upon the man she loved more than life, as the exclusive property of another woman. She had been visiting Mrs. Weedahl for the week previous to the fête and had thoroughly enjoyed the wit and sociability of the Jewess. Ambrose had interpreted the command of Mrs. Weedahl to stay away as an invitation to come, and so one day he had gone out and spent the afternoon with his sister and had surprised Mrs. Weedahl and Annette by appearing at Berylwood, as they were at dinner and remaining there until the following day.

"Now, Annette," said Mrs. Weedahl, as she sur-

veyed her guest from head to foot, "you certainly are the belle of Berylwood to-night. Perhaps you will make a conquest of the duke; they say he is unmarried. No, you don't want the duke, eh? Don't like his name? Of course, like a spoiled child, you want something you can't have. Well, come on, let's see the grounds and park before we go to the reception-room," and grasping the arm of Annette, they hastened out to inspect the wonderland that glowed and sparkled beyond. As they returned to the house and were about to ascend the steps, they found themselves face to face with Ambrose and his wife, who had just arrived. Ambrose and Annette were both unprepared for this meeting, but their embarrassment was perceptible only to the Jewess, and the crimson tide that flowed to the face of Annette was made invisible by the soft glow of the red calcium light that shone upon her. Quiet greetings were exchanged between the quartette, but no attempt at sociability was made by either. Ambrose and Mrs. Weedahl from motives of discretion; Mrs. Pierce from a fear that she would be subjected to unfavorable comment by the ladies of the Portland; and Annette for a reason that is needless to mention. But shortly after this they assembled in the reception-room where the guests who desired to pay their respects to the Jewess were announced in order. Ambrose always a careful and intelligent student of human nature, and keenly appreciating the opportunity thus offered him to study under favorable conditions a typical American assemblage to nearly all of whom the dollar was God, followed with eager eyes the movements of those who attracted his attention.

"Who is that thin faced man with the long hair, Mrs. Weedahl?" said Ambrose, as he looked over to where the object of his curiosity was standing.

"Oh, that is Butrand, the iconoclast. Some people call him an anarchist, but he isn't bad. He is like lots of other so called anarchists, who only want a government that is in accord with our constitution, and who in fact are really material out of which good Presbyterians could be made."

"And the thin wise looking man with a bald head and spectacles?"

"Why, that is Eppelsheimer, the author. He is a great novelist. It is said that he wrote two novels; one called, 'The Confessions of a Bachelor,' and the other, 'The Confessions of a Married Man.' He did it in two words; one of six letters and the other of four."

"I suppose of course the word of six letters was the married man's confession," said Ambrose laughingly.

Mrs. Weedahl looked upon him with a mocking smile of compassion, as she replied,

"You know more about law than literature, my boy. I always said you were slow, but guess again and you will be sure to guess right."

"And who, pray, is the black-eyed man with a dark vandyke beard?" said Ambrose.

"Why, that is one of my clergymen. He is the celebrated Jewish Rabbi Kroschow. He is supposed to be a great man, but he isn't. I once heard him in a street car berate the conductor for fully five minutes, because the conductor failed to tell him to get off at a certain street, and the rabbi reading a newspaper had been carried beyond his destination."

Mr. Ivan Kourtomsky was the next announcement.

"Tom has certainly done himself proud," said Mrs. Weedahl, as her protégé entered in a dress suit that fitted to perfection his well formed figure. The Russian dealer in rags and old iron certainly looked a patrician as with his pale mobile features, waxed moustache and carefully dressed iron gray hair, he gracefully greeted his hostess, and made room for others that followed him.

"Mrs. Brown-Jones and Mrs. M'Garrité," said the usher.

"Oil and molasses," said the Jewess sotto voce, as the ladies approached her.

"Oh, Mrs. Weedahl!" said the short fat lady, whose claws were concealed by a velvety unctuous voice. "How beautiful it all is, and, a—Mrs. A—Caldwell is assisting you to receive? How lovely indeed."

"That is just what I told Annette one hour ago. I said she was the belle of Berylwood. I am glad you think so too," said the Jewess.

"And pray tell me," said the lady still in purring tones, though her eyes sharply negatived the previous words of her hostess, "who was the artist who designed all this?"

"Why, I am indebted to Mr. Grill for many valuable suggestions," said the Ogress with a tone of voice in which a trace of irony was perceptible.

"Is it possible, and the color schemes are so lovely."

"Yes, society is well represented from the patrician with blue blood to the Bohemian with red. We are trying to please them all."

"Mr. Grill and Miss McKinney," said the usher.

"Oh, Lordy, look at Grill's collar, but I suppose he has a long neck and has to wear it high."

Nevertheless the Jewess greeted her manager and his lady with honest and undisguised pleasure, so that the obsequious but diplomatic bland and smiling Mr. Grill was not only glad to be there, but he also secretly felt that his business judgment had been nearly correct when, years ago, he had said that Mrs. Weedahl was a wonderful woman.

"Mayor Smith and Sheriff Caldwell of Raleigh," announced the usher.

Annette instinctively withdrew from the side of her hostess as these names were announced. Trembling with fear and loathing, she could remember only the drunken brute with bloodshot eyes who had cursed and struck her, so she turned away that she might not look upon the wretch, the mere thought of whom now filled her mind with horror. Her action quickly noted by Mrs. Weedahl was reflected in the cool greeting which the Jewess gave to the sheriff, who visibly winced as he noticed the action of his former wife and the chilling and silent acknowledgment of his greeting by his hostess.

Ambrose and his wife, at the request of Mrs. Weedahl, had remained near her in the reception room, but Mrs. Pierce whose general temperament and ideas of propriety were ever regulated by a strict code of morals, and so were never in accord with the adaptable mind and manners of her hostess, now felt an ill concealed embarrassment in her uncongenial society, and excusing herself, joined a group of ladies whom she knew and remained with them. At this moment a flutter of excitement and

something of a commotion was noticeable without, and the whispered information that the duke had arrived was imparted to Mrs. Weedahl.

"What shall I say to him, Ambrose?" said the anxious hostess. "I am not accustomed to meeting dukes, and perhaps I won't understand a word he says."

"Well, of course," said Ambrose, "as a Russian he is rather different from your Mr. Kourtomsky, but let him do the talking. They say he speaks English quite well, and of course like other foreigners he will be only too glad to show you how finely he can talk. He will of course talk about America, matters of public interest, and apologize for his bad English."

"His Highness, the Duke, Leo Cowscoff Catapussi-Ratamouski, and Judge Ferdinand Morris," announced the usher.

"And the animals entered one by one," said Annette, laughingly.

Mrs. Weedahl smiled graciously upon the duke and the judge who accompanied him.

"I have great pleasure in ze honor of being your guest," said the duke, bowing low. "I am charmed and delight. It is beautiful beyond compare. My English is not ze style correct, but I feel ze beauty and ze glory."

"The honor is mine, duke. Your English is very good, and I hope you will like America as well as you do Berylwood. Allow me to present you to a few of my friends."

The presentations were duly made and acknowledged and the duke smiling affably replied,

"I like America very much, madam, but ze

language is hard to speak. It was not what you say consistent, I work some at it each day. See now, ze word ague is a dissyllable, and ze word plague a monosyllable. It gives me ze plague and ze ague to speak ze words."

His auditors laughed merrily at this caustic criticism of our derivative tongue, and listened to his further remarks with eager attention.

"Ze newspapers here are not like vat ze are in Russia. I read to-day about ze riot. Ze big type make me look. I read ze reperter drew his refelver tzu keep back ze crowd. I know not what it mean."

"You mean," said his hostess, "that the reporter drew his revolver to keep back the crowd, and the big type, well we call that yellow journalism."

"Ze paper vas yellow?" said the duke inquiringly.

"No," said Mrs. Weedahl, "I mean sensational."

"Oh, I see," said the duke, "ze sensatione," and a mild expression of disdain appeared upon his face. "In Russia ze press is censored too much, and in America it is not censored enough."

The duke then adjusted his eye-glasses, and after quietly looking over the beautifully decorated room, and its occupants, his eye rested on Mr. Kourtomsky, whose appearance was at once suggestive of national kinship, and who at the time was the centre of a group of admirers, who had mistaken him for another Russian nobleman, evidently incognito.

"I haf not ze honor of knowing ze gentleman wif ze gray hair," said the duke.

"I shall present him to you very soon, duke,"

*Stolen
from
Voltaire*

said Mrs. Weedahl. "He is a Russian by birth, but is now a citizen of this country. He is interested quite heavily in iron and textile products. He is, as we say in America, 'up-to-date.' When he goes to a summer resort hotel, and there happens to be a game of progressive euchre, he always takes the first prize, if they allow him to play."

The duke bowed his acknowledgment of this information, and again remarked inquiringly,

"And ze stout lady wif ze fan? She looked distingue."

"Oh," said his hostess, as she unconsciously expressed her natural ridicule of her guest's weakness. "That is Mrs. Brown Hyphen Jones. She is indeed quite prepossessing; she has quite an ancestry. Her grandfather was a Carter, and she had an uncle whose name was John Smith. She is really made from superior clay, but she was spoiled in the baking."

"Oh," said the duke sympathetically, "she was spoiled by ze baker. Will you present me to her?"

"With pleasure," said the Jewess, and accompanying him to where Mrs. Brown-Jones was standing, the presentation was duly made, and then Mrs. Weedahl devoted herself to the reception and entertainment of others.

At that moment the seductive music of a Strauss Waltz was heard in the ballroom, and the duke, bowing low, said,

"Shall I haf ze honor of a dance wif you, Mrs. Brown Hyphen?"

"Jones, sir, if you please," said the lady with a

stinging sarcasm that was thinly veiled by her effort at self-control.

The embarrassed duke appreciated in some sense the blunder he had made, and hastened to correct himself.

“I beg ta touson pardons, Mrs. Jones Hyphen; a touson pardons, I hope ——”

But the hyphenated relic of questionable lineage with a look toward her hostess which truly indicated for once the love she felt for her, abruptly left the embarrassed duke, and in sadly ruffled dignity swept grandly from the room. Mrs. Weedahl noticing her abrupt departure, and the duke's painful perplexity, hastened to him, her face expressive of anxiety, but the duke's first words to her were sufficiently explanatory.

“I tink, madam, I did not get ze name correct; was it you say Mrs. Jones Hyphen or Brown Hyphen?”

Ambrose and his friend Judge Morris, who had accompanied the duke, stepped forward in time to hear this inquiry, and joined politely in the uncontrollable merriment of Mrs. Weedahl.

“I am sorry, duke,” said the Jewess. “I did not mean that you should make an error in pronouncing her name, but Mrs. Brown-Jones is very sensitive, and somewhat proud of the hyphen, which appears in her name. It was my fault, and I will apologize to her, as I do to you.”

The duke's face lighted up with a most amiable smile for his hostess, as he graciously assured her that he had nothing to forgive, and then his expression became more thoughtful and indicated his thorough perception of the matter, as he said,—

"But you speak ze truth, madam, when you say she was spoiled in ze baking."

"Mr. Adolph Langley and Mr. Robert Wrenn," announced the usher. Mrs. Weedahl then presented Kourtomsky to the duke, and with Ambrose excused herself in order to greet Adolph and the detective.

Bob, profuse in manner and perspiring in person, extended one hand to his hostess and the other to Ambrose, and appeared in a condition of speechless rapture. His head assumed a sort of circular rolling motion, as bowing repeatedly he retained in his possession the hands of his hostess and our hero, as if he expected them by some magnetic influence to restore to him the power of utterance. In the upward motion, as his face was visible, his lips were seen to move, but no sound came therefrom, and it was only when he realized that his captives were struggling to free themselves from his grasp, that he found his voice.

"Gee wizz, gee wizz, but this is great," said the detective, and then his eyes, after taking in the beautiful room, modestly rested on the many lovely shoulders of the ladies; he continued, "an' jes' look at the shoulders. If we saw these ladies in bathin' suits to-morrow, we'd know all about 'em. Their personal appearance is certainly great, and that reminds me of how I was riding in a crowded street car one day, and a sharp lurch of the car sent a pretty girl, who was standing, into the arms of a male who was seated. At the same time a fat colored lady fell into the arms of another male, who was seated. Nobody said anything, but the different expressions on the faces of the two males were

worth going miles to see. I never realized before how important it was to look nice."

"Mr. Wrenn," said the Jewess, "like all other men, you are easily deceived. The supposed 'female form divine' thanks to the costumer and perfumer, often flatters the imagination, but shorn of these attributes it would almost invariably offend the senses."

After Adolph had greeted Mrs. Weedahl and his master, Annette approached the group, and tapping the shoulder of the stoical clerk with her fan, said with a happy smile, "Now, Adolph, you never do talk much, but I know you can dance, and so I shall claim you at once. You must not forget that I entertained you at the Richelieu for two days, though you didn't speak to me until you were nearly ready to go away, so now you must reciprocate the courtesy by entertaining me."

Adolph similingly consented, and as Annette took his arm to go to the ballroom, Ambrose detaining them, said in a low voice to Annette, "Stay with Adolph; your ex-husband seems to have eyes only for you."

"Perhaps he is falling in love with me," said Annette laughingly. "Blessings brighten when they take their flight, you know."

"But absence makes the heart grow fonder, fonder of the other fellow," said Ambrose.

"Leave me with Adolph," said Annette, "and look around you; somebody in company of Mrs. Brown-Jones has eyes only for you," and with a look which Ambrose clearly understood, she was escorted by Adolph to the ballroom. As they thus left him, Ambrose saw his wife and Mrs. Brown-

Jones talking together in the room adjoining, and as he reentered the reception-room, Mrs. Weedahl said, "Ambrose, I really did not mean that Mrs. Brown-Jones should be offended. I wouldn't be rude to a guest. Tell her the duke did not understand. You can fix it up, I know."

"I fear that I am unequal to the task," said Ambrose, "but I will try." Then approaching the divan upon which his wife and the offended lady were seated, he expressed the regrets of Mrs. Weedahl, and explained that the duke's error had been made by reason of the fact that when he had asked for an introduction to Mrs. Brown-Jones to the exclusion of other guests, and had remarked upon her distinguished appearance, Mrs. Weedahl in a desire to impress upon him the fact that Mrs. Brown-Jones was a patrician, had mentioned that her grandfather was a Carter, and her uncle a Smith, and that the name of Brown-Jones was written with a hyphen.

"So you see, Mrs. Brown-Jones," said Ambrose, "the trouble has arisen entirely from the duke's imperfect knowledge of English, and his misunderstanding of what Mrs. Weedahl said."

Mrs. Brown-Jones looked and felt very uncomfortable and though pacified with the duke and Mrs. Weedahl, she was made by Ambrose's apology very angry with herself. She felt that she had acted like a simpleton, and as neither the duke nor Mrs. Weedahl gave her further consideration, she found herself humiliated and punished by her own silly pride and powerless to remedy the matter save by a complete sacrifice of her dignity and self-respect.

But it was now past the hour of midnight, and the social triumph of the Ogress was complete. A

collation was being served in the banquet-room and about the corridors and porches adjoining. Salads, dainty ices and confections appeared and disappeared. The constant popping of champagne corks mingled with the laughter of merry parties of guests standing in groups or seated at near-by tables, and the sounds of mirth and revelry became more uproarious as the wine flowed faster and faster. Mrs. Weedahl, smiling and happy, was congratulated, praised and fawned upon until she would have felt justified in believing that the world was right and that she alone was wrong; that she alone was ungrateful and unkind, and that the world at large was nothing but loyalty and love. But the Jewess knew in her heart that society in evening dress was but little different from society in business garb; that Mr. Kourtomsky had once remarked that a swallow-tailed coat was not a suitable rig for shop lifting, and that a great many people would sell themselves in an effort to win a fifty cent euchre prize. Mr. Kourtomsky, when he said this, had not admitted that he himself was susceptible to such a weakness, but without seeking to prove or disprove this suspicion against him, the intelligent reader knows that, "There are others."

And now the laughter and noisy revelry is almost drowned in the crashing music of the band which is playing the waltz, "Nanon." Ambrose had been dancing with Annette, and as the music ceases they walk flushed and warm to the outer pavilion. In a corner of the pavilion where the dense shade made the darkness profound, they bade each other good-night, and Annette, as she tremblingly sought to control the mad rebellious love that filled her

heart, and weakly essayed to repulse that of her lover, had said with petulant decision, though the words died on her lips, "for it must be good-night until to-morrow; come, we must not stay here." Then retracing their steps they saw in the reception-hall adjoining, the wife of Ambrose seated at a table with Mrs. Weedahl. Near at hand were Bob Wrenn and Adolph, and at another table a short distance away was the sheriff with several politicians, who like himself were perceptibly feeling the influence of the wine they had taken. As Bob saw Ambrose and Annette enter the hall, he halted a waiter who at that moment was passing with a bottle of champagne. Bob's face was flushed and his manner was quite bold from the effects of wine, as he said, "Come, judge, will you drink with us? and you too, sheriff?" as Bob saw him turn and look toward him.

"We are going to drink the 'Navy Toast,' sheriff. Here's to our wives and sweethearts; may they never meet."

But as Bob uttered these words, and in the dead silence that followed, an undefinable feeling of dread filled the heart of Ambrose, and indeed it seemed to be felt by all who thus heard the detective's words. Ambrose turned sharply and, as he did so, he saw the slender, graceful figure of a woman closely veiled, standing in front of the doorway at the main entrance. The woman was clothed in a plain close fitting dress of cheap material, and the heavy veil over her face gave no clue to her identity, but both Ambrose and the sheriff recognized the frail figure, as it paused for a moment surveying the party with wine-glasses in their hands, but for a

moment only, and then turning quickly it went noiselessly down the steps and speeding along the smooth walk was lost in the gloom beyond.

"Ruth, my sister," said Ambrose in a low tone.

"It was Adele," said the sheriff quietly, as he arose fearful and trembling and looked out into the night.

Ambrose in company with Adolph went out and made a search of the adjacent grounds in the hope that he would find Ruth awaiting him at some near-by point, but their search was fruitless, and they returned assuming that she had gone straight to the house where she was stopping, a short distance away. Ambrose pondered deeply as to the motive of his sister in thus appearing to him, but could assign no other reason than one of curiosity to see as an unbidden guest the beauty of the mansion and park.

And now, though some of the guests were leaving and carriages rolling up to the grand entrance conveyed to the waiting trains, the sounds of music and revelry seemed to increase rather than diminish. The crashing music of the band seemed louder than ever; the wine flowed faster, and the gayety of the merry guests grew more hilarious. The incandescent stars in the park glowed with undiminished brilliancy, but the fairies had disappeared, and the park itself was deserted. Ambrose and Mrs. Weedahl with their immediate friends were seated in a pavilion outside of the ballroom. The music of the band rendered conversation difficult, and Ambrose, moodily engaged with his thoughts and intending to make the next train for home, impatiently consulted his watch in his anxiety to leave.

As he thus sat nervously waiting, he was startled by a very visible commotion at the side entrance. A minute more, and the old gardener, for many years a faithful employee of the Jewess, came bursting out upon the pavilion calling for his mistress, and with his voice and manner expressive of horror and consternation. "Mrs. Weedahl, oh! Mrs. Weedahl," said he, "a woman has been murdered, murdered in your own park. Come quick! Come quick!"

This awful information shouted by the gardener in a voice that rose above the crashing music of the band, sank deep in the hearts of those who heard his words. It was quickly conveyed to the musicians, and the music instantly ceased. Chairs were overturned; tables were upset, and the crash of broken glasses was heard. Mrs. Weedahl and the ladies with her, sat as if frozen with terror. Ambrose, with an instinct born of the fate that had ever hedged about his life, felt that the gardener's words portended an additional libation for his cup of misery, and though the blood seemed to leave his heart as he uttered the words, he grasped in an instant the arm of the old gardener, as he fiercely said, "Tell me who is she? What does she look like?"

"Indeed, sir, I hardly know. She is a slender young woman, very plainly dressed. She is not dead, but I think she is dying. I heard her moans, and saw a man run as I approached her."

"Show me where she is," said Ambrose. "Quick, come with me," and still holding the old man's arm, they rushed off in the direction the gardener had indicated.

Mrs. Weedahl, now surrounded by her servants,

roused herself as she saw Ambrose with the old man, accompanied by Adolph, Bob Wrenn and other guests, disappear amid the trees.

"Call the coachman," said she. "Let him saddle a horse and ride to Raleigh. Let him get all the men he can to hunt the murderer. Where is the sheriff? Has he gone? Tell him I want him."

But the sheriff, oblivious to all his surroundings, was snoring peacefully in a porch rocker at the front. The servants, in obedience to the commands of their mistress, hastened to the stables, but soon returned with the information that the coachman could not be found.

"Then run there yourselves; come, ladies, let us go after them," and the Jewess, followed by many others, followed in the direction that Ambrose and his party had taken.

With the old gardener almost breathless, as Ambrose hurried him on, they soon reached the scene of the murder. Lying on the walk near the rustic bench where Ambrose had met his sister, was the body of a woman, whose faint moans showed that life still remained. A lantern flashed upon her face by the old gardener revealed at once her identity, and Ambrose, falling upon his knees in a torrent of grief, moaned in anguish,

"Ruth! oh, Ruth, my sister, my poor sister, speak to me, speak to me."

An ugly gaping wound above her temple showed how she had been struck down, and the torn-up condition of the ground indicated the struggle she had made; also the soil was red with blood from the frightful wound in her head. As

Ambrose took her hand and uttered her name, her eyelids trembled for an instant and then opened, and a faint smile appeared on her face, as she recognized her brother.

"She lives, she lives," he almost shouted. "You will live, Ruth; be brave, little sister. You must live for me. Tell me who did this, who did this?"

In a voice so faint that Ambrose placed his ear to her mouth to catch the words, she said, "It was the half-breed coachman, the negro who works for Mrs. Weedahl."

"She says," said Ambrose, turning to the assembled men, "that it was the half-breed negro coachman, who works for Mrs. Weedahl. Witness this, all you men. Was that what you said, sister?"

"Yes," was the answer of the dying woman in a voice that all could hear.

Ruth's eyes were again closed, and at this moment a physician who had been one of the guests, came running toward them, considerably in advance of Mrs. Weedahl and her party, who now drew near. The physician hurriedly knelt over the prostrate form, and administered a restorative; then feeling her pulse and noting her faintly beating heart, he shook his head negatively.

"Cannot she be moved from here?" said Ambrose with an imploring look at the doctor.

"No," said the physician, and he again turned to the dying woman, as he noticed a quivering movement pass over her body, and she lay quite still. He felt for her pulse and then pressed his ear against her breast for a moment. Then arising and

placing his hand on the shoulder of Ambrose, he said, "She is dead."

At this information Ambrose, grasping the lifeless hands of his sister, kissed her lovingly in grief beyond the power of expression. He thus remained weeping silently, still kneeling by her prostrate form, and in unison with those whose tears flowed in sympathy, still praying to an Almighty God. Presently in a low, subdued tone, seemingly in communion with the departed spirit of his sister, his voice choked with sobs, his utterances incoherent and sentences broken and scarcely intelligible, he moaned, "Here, dear Ruth, you met me—— We were parted so long—— You remember me; your boy brother, and your dolls—— You prayed for God's forgiveness and mine—— You had promised God—— You promised me—you would not sin again—— Here, where you made the promise, you died in keeping it—— You watered this soil with your tears of repentance, as you prayed, and now it is soaked with your lifeblood—— You died defending the honor God gave you in repentance—— You died a victim of the wanton lust of a half-breed negro fiend—— I, your brother, will avenge you—through the law—I will be your avenger—Ruth, I will avenge you."

And again giving way to his uncontrollable grief, he leaned forward to caress the lifeless remains.

But now from among the group of silent, awe-stricken guests, whose presence is unnoted by Ambrose as he kneels in despairing grief and prayer, a woman steps forward—a woman who in the purity of her love seeks only to console and comfort him,

as her gentle hand is laid upon his shoulder in a loving caress.

“Come, Ambrose, dear.”

It is the voice of his wife, mournful and pathetic,
“Come with me.”

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH MISGUIDED PUBLIC SENTIMENT REACHES
THE LOWEST STAGES OF DEPRAVITY, AND IN
WHICH THE AUTHOR AGAIN RISKS OFFENDING
IT BY TELLING THE TRUTH

LEAVING Adolph and a few trustworthy servants in charge of the dead body of his unfortunate sister, Ambrose and other guests returned with Mrs. Weedahl to the mansion. The coroner was hastily summoned, and by his authority the body of Ruth was removed to the cottage where she had lived. But the festival at Berylwood was ended, and as the awed and sorrowful party approached the house through the illuminated groves, the brilliancy of the interior with waving palms and flowers seemed to jar upon them. The odors of wine and roses were alternately perceptible: American beauties crushed by the tread of careless feet; tables littered with dishes; glasses partly filled with wine, were left untouched. The dismayed guests, moving about as if in fear, quietly conversed in whispers as they hastened their preparations for departure; for as if to mock this display of worldly pride, as did the unseen hand at Belshazzar's Feast, two unbidden guests had appeared, the one a poor despised wreck on the ocean of life, the other that great unwelcome visitor who claims all seasons for his own. The silence compared with the revelry of the preceding hour was painful, and was broken only by the rumbling of carriages as they rolled up

to the grand entrance; the sharp reports of closing carriage doors which echoed about the portals of the mansion, and the hoof beats of impatient horses, as the guests were conveyed to a belated train. The musicians quietly disappeared; caterers and waiters noiselessly removed the débris of the feast. The lights were gradually extinguished, and soon, with the exception of a few orderly servants flitting about, the mansion was apparently deserted. In the meantime, in the privacy of an up-stairs room, Mrs. Weedahl with Ambrose and others, was busily engaged in a discussion of the best means to be employed in the apprehension of the murderer. In a few hours it would be dawn. The sheriff had been aroused from his slumbers and duly advised of the murder. Trembling with horror as the terrible facts were related to him, and with an emphasized consciousness of his own guilt, the news completely sobered him. He expressed a desire to avoid meeting Mrs. Weedahl and Ambrose in their consultation, but with the assurance that he would at once go in to Raleigh and send out messengers to hunt for, and, if possible, to capture the half-breed, he took his departure.

“He is a smart nigger,” said Bob Wrenn, who had been quietly listening to the discussion, “and so we must imagine, as well as we can, just what a smart nigger would do. The gardener says that all the horses are in the stable, so unless he steals one somewhere, he won’t get far away. He can’t travel after daylight, for he knows that everybody will be looking for him. He will hide somewhere, and lay low until night comes again. If we can get men enough to work and hunt for him to-day, we may

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catch him, but if he gets another night he may escape."

His auditors fully appreciated the wisdom of Bob's remarks and the necessity for immediate action. Ambrose handed Bob a few bank-notes, with instructions to 'phone and telegraph to all near-by points an account of the tragedy, and a description of the murderer. As Bob arose to leave, Adolph entered the room and was instructed by Ambrose to go with Bob, and to return after daylight and report on what had been done. As Bob and Adolph left the room, Mrs. Weedahl, excusing herself, arose and followed them. She detained Bob, and at her request he followed her to her own apartment.

"Mr. Wrenn," said the Jewess, "I am told by Judge Pierce that you are an honest man, and also a clever one. I want you to take a few private instructions from me. I want you to post a reward of \$1,000 for that hound, dead or alive." Then opening a safe, she said, "And I want you to take this money and use it. I cannot and would not offer it to Judge Pierce," and she placed a huge roll of notes of large denominations in the hands of the astonished detective. "I want you to get every man in Raleigh or near by to work as soon as you can; pay them in advance. Hire horses; send men in every direction; get them started quickly, and spare no expense. If you need more money, come to me. My festival has ended in a horrible murder, and worst of all the crime was committed by a servant of mine. I have spent a fortune in giving a foolish show, and I will spend another fortune, if need be, in putting a rope about

the neck of that miserable beast. Now go, quickly, and do not sleep or rest until you have him."

During the discussion which had preceded this action of Mrs. Weedahl, Ambrose, whose emotions were alternately those of rage and grief, had been most intently watched by his wife, who as she thus in silence gazed upon him, seemed to feel only anxiety and dismay. For knowing as she did the liberal mind of her husband and his conservative views as to the punishment of crime, she felt a sense of alarm, as she endeavored to read his thoughts, and to surmise the attitude and action he would take when in this case the hand of the murderer in a most crucial test of his judicial honor and consistency, had struck home at his own flesh and blood. So his wife and Annette had both watched him closely and wonderingly during the discussion. His silence and reserve had seemed almost tantamount to indifference. As he nervously moved in his chair, it was difficult to determine whether he was busy with his own thoughts or listening to the opinion of others; for, while at times he seemed to take an intelligent interest in what was said, in an absent-minded way he frowned darkly at some kind expression of sympathy or offer of assistance, and it was only when Mrs. Weedahl returned to the room and expressed the limit of her indignation, that he roused himself from the depths of his troubled meditation, and a strange light of intelligent interest shone in his eyes.

"I hope they will catch him and burn him alive, the hound," said the Jewess, her red eyes gleaming with rage, and her massive frame shaking with emotion, as she noted the silent, despairing attitude of

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Ambrose, and felt a sense of personal disgrace, as she thought that innocently, but indirectly some degree of responsibility rested upon her. "I hope they will burn him at the stake. Hanging is too good for him."

It was then, as Mrs. Weedahl uttered these words that the apathy of Ambrose disappeared. He seemed to throw off his dejection and despair. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to brush away the clouds that obscured his perception, and as he arose from his chair, and the fleeting shadow of a smile appeared upon his face, Mrs. Weedahl, with quick intuition, could see that the man and the judge stood before her. At this action of her attorney, this silent reproof, for Ambrose uttered not a word, the hard lines in the face of the Jewess softened, and her voice and words became conciliatory, as she resumed her seat and continued, "I know, Ambrose, you are a lawyer and a judge. Oh! if all other lawyers and judges were like you. I expected this attitude on your part. I am proud of myself for expecting it and proud of you, as I find my expectations realized."

"Your implied confidence in me, and your praise is far more than I deserve, Mrs. Weedahl," said Ambrose. "It is true, I would not counsel violence, and would prevent it if I could, but my heart is full of revenge. If they catch him, let the task of sending him to the gallows be mine. I promise you that, through the law, I will do my work the best I can."

"Well, now, Ambrose," said his hostess, "we can do no more good by sitting here. You must

go to bed and rest until Adolph returns and reports to you."

"If you will allow me," said Ambrose, "I will remain right here. It is now near dawn, and I would like to be alone for a while. I will rest on this couch a little, for I cannot sleep, and wish to think the matter over."

Mrs. Weedahl consented to this arrangement, but stipulated that Ambrose and his wife should remain at Berylwood as her guests, while a search was being made for the murderer. Ambrose, realizing that this would facilitate his efforts to capture the negro, gratefully accepted the invitation, and the ladies withdrew from the room.

Ambrose then stretched himself upon the couch, and with closed eyes but sleepless brain, he struggled alone with his conflicting emotions. Alternate curses and prayers possessed his heart and mind, and fought for the ascendancy. He thought of the negro and cursed him. He thought of his sister and prayed to God, and wondered if to her, death was the end of all? He thought of his wife and prayed for her. He thought of himself, and cursed the motives that had inspired his marriage, and upon which he fixed the real responsibility for his married misery. He thought how an hour ago he had, with fleeting stolen glances noticed his wife watching him with dismay and loving anxiety, and had felt that he was again on the rack of impeachment. He thought of Annette, his victim, and cursed himself again. With a moan that was almost a sharp cry of despair, he writhed upon the couch as he remembered the troubled, tearful look of helpless love she had bestowed upon him. He

thought of the Jewess, the medium through whose subtle but indirect agency he had been in his love for Annette, alternately transported to Paradise and kicked down to Hades. He thought of how, as they thus sat together, she had with silent consciousness and a knowledge of his most secret thoughts, watched him,—an unhappy man in the presence of his wife and mistress; watched him, as he sorrowed alone in the presence of one woman, who had the right to comfort him, but could not, and of another who had the power and dared not. Thus hopeless and alone, he endured the keenest torments of perdition as he had long endured them, repulsing the cup of gall and wormwood that was ever outstretched toward him, and vainly fighting for the water of life that was held beyond his reach. He felt that in the minds of these three women, he had as a man been subjected to a crucial analysis; that in his despairing grief at the loss of a depraved sister, they had made a new estimate of him; that he had shown a depth of feeling, which was inconsistent with his habitual mask of indifference and reserve, and then he said,—“Mrs. Weedahl is proud of me; Annette pities and loves me, and my wife feels more than all else, a sense of wonder that I should show such grief and love for a strumpet, when my heart to her seems emotionless and dead,” and here his eyes opened and an ironical smile stole over his face. “And so,” he said, “I am an honest judge; an honest lawyer. She didn’t say ‘honest husband,’ but she might have said ‘worthy brother.’ It isn’t always an easy matter to live up to a reputation, good or bad,” and then his thoughts reverted to the horrible death of his sister. “Curse

the fiend," he said. "If they catch him, and they surely will, he will be lynched. Shall I help them? I her only brother? Shall I lead the mob with torch, rope and gun? Would it not be fitting and appropriate? The brother of an outcast woman; a deposed judge, whose decisions shocked the morality of a community; a hireling lawyer, who ekes out an existence as the tool of disreputable men and women; a husband, who forsakes his wife and in adultery imperils his own soul and that of an innocent woman, who sought his aid and protection. How deeply have I wronged them both. Ah! woman! In whose name man achieves his greatest glory, or for whom he sinks to direst misery; since the day that Judas betrayed the Great Nazarene with a kiss, you have ever been most unhappy victims of that damnable duplicity the arch traitor thus taught his sons. So, why should I not carry the torch, the red flag of anarchy, and lead the mob? Why should I respect the law when that respect subjects me to naught but hell? Why should I respect the law, when my interpretation of its justice is an insult to modern morals? Why should I seek to restrain a mob of people from committing murder, when such action would be tacitly approved by municipal authorities and high Christian citizens? Why should I not justify to the world my accredited reputation? No, no, I will not. I would not," and he wiped away with a handkerchief the great drops of perspiration that stood upon his brow.

As the gray dawn of day struggled through the window, it revealed the haggard, drawn lines of his face, and with set teeth, he moaned again. "But I

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will avenge you, Ruth, my poor sister. I will avenge you. I swear it, even though the law should fail."

Thus Ambrose remained until the brightness of the early summer morn heralded the rising sun. Then sitting upright upon the couch, he said,—“I must go down-stairs. Perhaps Adolph has returned, and is awaiting me.”

He entered a bathroom, and after making a hasty toilet, he went down and out upon the porch. Adolph had not yet returned. Meeting a servant, he asked for coffee and rolls. These were served him in the breakfast-room, and he then went out front, and for an hour or more paced to and fro upon the broad piazza. A bell rang, announcing breakfast, yet none of the ladies had appeared. At that moment a light wagon stopped in front, and Ambrose saw two servants carrying a trunk. With idle curiosity, he inquired, “Who is leaving so early?”

“It is Mrs. Caldwell’s baggage, sir,” said the man, touching his cap respectfully.

“Oh, is it? Yes, I see.” He made no further comment to the man, but turned away muttering bitterly to himself, “Of course, it is not a matter in which I am to be consulted. She goes and comes. It is no business of mine. She goes, because she cannot stay here now. When I need her so much, I must be denied even the privilege of looking at her.”

He then entered the hall, and as he did so, Annette came down the stairs, wearing a hat and street costume. Beneath the lashes of her lovely eyes, Ambrose could see traces of unshed tears. She silently touched his arm, and they entered an adjoining room.

"I am so helpless," she said, as she wiped from her eyes the unbidden tears, which she could not restrain, "and I cannot be otherwise here. Good-bye, and God help you and bless you."

As they thus remained together, the fleeting minutes passed to them unconsciously, and again the breakfast bell rang, and the sound of footsteps was heard in the adjoining hall.

"Oh, here comes somebody," said Annette petulantly. "I suppose I must eat, and what will you do?"

"I shall eat with you," said Ambrose, as a servant appeared at the door, and addressing the lady, announced, "Your breakfast is ready."

"Yes, thank you," said Annette, "I am coming at once," and then, as the servant went away she looked into the eyes of her lover somewhat anxiously, frightened by the audacity of his proposal, and said hesitatingly, "But it won't be just quite proper, will it?"

"It will be quite as proper as remaining here," said Ambrose with a smile; "also, please remember that I am hungry, and necessity knows no law, not even that of propriety. I have been out on the porch for more than two hours, and under the circumstances, I am quite sure that in eating my breakfast now, Mrs. Pierce will excuse me, and Mrs. Weedahl will forgive me."

And again, as they bade each other good-bye, the minutes passed unconsciously. Presently the butler came along the hall, again with heavy footsteps, and this time coughing quite deliberately.

"Oh, dear," said Annette, smiling. "He is coming after us. I'll give him a voice lozenge. He is entirely too wise."

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The smooth shaven face of the discreet butler, however, bore no trace of undue wisdom, as he bowed ceremoniously, and raising his hand to his mouth, partially suppressed an apologetic cough, as Annette, with blushing face, followed by Ambrose, appeared in the hall and hastened to the breakfast-room.

"Does Mrs. Weedahl know you are leaving?" said Ambrose, as they were seated at the table.

"Oh, yes, I told her about it after we left you. I told her I simply could not endure it to stay here, and be silent. She said she understood, and I said I would leave on an early train before she was up. I am so glad I was an 'early bird,' for once, as I caught you," and Annette smiled brightly.

"And I," said Ambrose, "as a worm, congratulate myself in being out in time to get caught."

"Pass the cream, please," said Annette demurely. "I'll forgive you for being absent-minded now;" and then—"did you sleep after we left you?"

"No," said Ambrose quietly. "I did some thinking. Did you sleep?"

"No, I packed my trunk, and then, like you, I thought. I thought how bad I was, and how good I would like to be with you."

The pathetic, plaintive tone of her voice as she said this found a responsive chord in the heart of her lover, whose only immediate answer was a sigh, but after a moment's silence, he said, "Well, we are not as bad as some people, because we have sense enough not to let the public know how bad we really are."

"Then," said Annette, "the worst sin is to be found out?"

"Yes," said Ambrose, "and the vowels of 'found out' are 'o, u' twice over."

"What did the sheriff say when he was told of your sister's death?" said Annette.

"They say he was very kind and sympathetic, but I am not sure. In fact, I have often wondered whether the wise man who said, 'Speak gently of the erring,' used the words in a spirit of sympathy or discretion. I understand also that the sheriff has said that he is morally opposed to divorce, and has grieved a great deal over your action in thus leaving him. In his grief, the cash feature may have been a consideration to some extent, but he is reported to have said that the hand of Providence witnesses all marriage contracts."

"Well," said Annette, "I think if Providence had anything to do with my marriage contract, He repudiated His connection with it long before I did."

"It is a good thing," said Ambrose, "to take life philosophically, if we can, and to grade our own moral status with precision. I always like to feel that there are a great many people in this world who morally are better than I am, and also that there are some who are worse."

They finished their breakfast undisturbed by either Mrs. Weedahl or the wife, but the presence of servants afforded them no further opportunities for privacy, and they were forced to content themselves with commonplace remarks and stolen glances, whose meanings, so well understood, were not commonplace at all. They thus remained at the table satisfied in the hopelessness of greater consolation, to have remained there indefinitely, for, such is the perfection of a complete affinity of

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sex, that words are superfluous, and the eyes, "windows of the soul," are the only mediums necessary for the accurate interpretation of thorough congeniality, but as they sat thus pensively regarding each other, unwilling to part, and yet realizing that each fleeting moment brought the time for parting nearer, Ambrose felt in his desperation that his eyes alone could not express his every thought with requisite precision, so he said, "I shall return to the city in a very few days." But here the discreet butler entered the breakfast-room, and announced to Annette, "Madam, the carriage is waiting for you, and you will have just time enough to make the eight o'clock train," upon which Annette rose from the table, and in a moment more was on her way to the station.

After Annette had gone, Ambrose, still arrayed in a dress suit, telephoned to the Portland, and requested Mr. Grill to go to his apartments and to send a messenger with some necessary changes of clothing for himself and Mrs. Pierce. Then lighting a cigar, he went down the serpentine road to the entrance-gate, and the emotions in his heart were very different from those of the preceding hour. He was now the man in whom all feelings of love were banished. He was a lawyer, cold and judicial; a judge, in whose heart sentiment and mercy were under the absolute control of justice. He eagerly looked down the road, and waited for Adolph to return.

"What can he be doing that requires so much time?" he said. Ambrose was, of course, unaware of what Mrs. Weedahl had done, and of what she had required Bob to do, but Bob, with

the assistance of Adolph, had done his work well.

Ambrose, as he looked down the road, could plainly see the cottage in which lay the body of his sister. He noticed at the gate a long, black carriage, and occasionally men passed in and out of the house.

"I will go there now, even if my visit is ill-timed," he said, walking down the road. He soon reached the house, and entered the open front door. As he stood in the hallway, the undertaker appeared, and noticing the strange gentleman in a dress suit, eyed him curiously.

"I am her brother," said Ambrose in explanation. "Is she—could I see her now?"

"I am very sorry," said the undertaker in kindly polite tones. "You could not see her now, and owing to my treatment of her face, you should not see her until late this afternoon."

The woman who kept the house, now appeared and recognizing Ambrose, at once was profusely fawning in manner and conciliatory in speech, as she saw that some one was apparently interested in the burial of the poor victim, and that she would be paid for her trouble.

"Your sister was a good woman, Mr. Pierce, a fine woman. She used to be a little gay and didn't seem to care much, but she had changed; she was ——"

"Tell me," said Ambrose, interrupting her with an impatient frown, "what time did she leave here last night, and did she say anything to you before leaving?"

"Yes, sir, I was in bed when she went out. I

had just gone to bed, for we had been sitting out on the porch, listening to the music and looking at the lights. Your sister came to my room with a hat on and a heavy veil over her face, and said, 'Mrs. Boger, I am going over to see the house and park. No one will recognize me through this veil. I will be back soon, so don't lock the door.' It was then about half-past twelve, for I had heard the clock strike some time before. Poor girl, she didn't come back as she expected."

"No," said Ambrose. "Now tell me, when did you notice this change for the better in my sister's conduct?"

"Why, sir, it was right after the day that she went down to the sheriff's office and exposed him and herself too. She scarcely went out of the house after that day, and no one called here to see her. I tell you, sir, the people of Raleigh pitied her, but they said the sheriff got what he deserved."

Ambrose questioned the woman at length, and learned that the half-breed coachman had one day in passing the house impudently accosted her, and asked her to ride with him, but that Ruth had made no reply. He notified the woman that she would be required as a witness if the half-breed was captured, and then learned that Adolph had made arrangements for the burial of Ruth in the Raleigh cemetery, on the morning of the following day, which would be Sunday, but that the arrangements were to be subject to the approval of his master. Ambrose saw no reason for changing the plans of his clerk, and while thus seated on the cottage porch, he saw Adolph coming up the hill, and hastened out to meet him.

"He will have something of a job to get away," said Adolph quietly. "Fully three hundred men, half of them on horseback, are already scouring the country, and carrying with them to be posted, notices of the reward."

"What reward?" said Ambrose.

"Oh, I thought you knew," said Adolph, and then he told his master of what Mrs. Weedahl had done, and how Bob had used the large amount of money she had given him, and how strong and willing men had quickly responded to its magic influence.

"I always said she had a heart," said Ambrose with feeling, and his eyes were dimmed with moisture, "but no one would believe it."

As they walked up the winding driveway to the mansion, Ambrose saw his wife and Mrs. Weedahl awaiting them on the steps at the entrance. They had felt some anxiety at his absence, though the butler had told them, "Judge Pierce had breakfasted with Mrs. Caldwell, and after her departure he had lighted a cigar and gone out for a walk." They had then correctly guessed where he was, and so greeted him quietly and made no comment in regard to his absence.

The party, then seated on the porch, discussed at length the efforts that were being made to capture the negro, and then Adolph returned to Raleigh, where in the hotel office he had established his headquarters, and was a medium of communication for those engaged in the search. Ambrose using the 'phone at Berylwood, communicated with a number of distant points, and frequently with Adolph at the Raleigh House. At

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noon, a messenger arrived with his clothing from the Portland, and the change from dress suit to business garb was quickly made.

During the afternoon, Adolph 'phoned him that the excitement existing in Raleigh was growing worse, and that frequent threats of lynching were heard on all sides. Ambrose then called up the sheriff, and inquired if he was taking proper measures to prevent a lynching.

"Yes," said the sheriff, "I have heard that many threats of lynching have been made, and have taken the precaution to swear in twelve extra officers, who will defend the jail, if the negro is caught. I doubt very much, however, that we can make a successful defense. The sentiment for lynching is very strong. You know my personal feelings in the matter, and you know I am more or less unpopular. I shall do what I think is best in the way of official duty."

Ambrose realized at once that the unpopular sheriff was considering public sentiment at the sacrifice of official duty, and that while he proposed to make a show of upholding the law, his real purpose was to restore in some degree his lost prestige as a politician, by giving up the prisoner after a slight show of resistance. Ambrose felt that it was no time to mince words, and knowing the sheriff to be a coward at heart, and that he would be influenced by any argument of force that promised him personal safety, he felt that a threat would be the only effective incentive to secure from this official a proper performance of duty. So in peremptory tones, the meaning of which could not be mistaken, he said, "I shall expect you and your men, sheriff,

to do their duty. I shall expect you to prevent a lynching if the murderer is caught, even at the risk of your lives. I will help you if you need me. Remember, sheriff, there must be no treachery. It is my right to demand this of you. It is the right of the brother of Adele Moran, who with Burt Stricker, your hired tool, went to the Richelieu, and for you sought to blackmail your wronged wife and me. Be sure to defend your prisoner, if you get him, sheriff. If you fail, you shall answer to me."

Shortly after this telephone interview with the sheriff, a fleet saddle horse, which had been reserved for the use of Ambrose, was brought around front, and vaulting to the back of the beautiful animal, Ambrose went for a short ride. He went out in the country for a few miles, and then returning stopped at the cottage where the body of his sister, robed for the grave, was lying. For nearly an hour he remained in the little darkened parlor, alone with the dead, and until the increasing shadows in the room told of the coming twilight. As he sorrowfully arose to leave the room, he heard the distant shouting of men, and the clattering feet of horses in the distance, and rushing to the cottage porch, he saw coming a carriage drawn by a team of horses on the run and reeking with foam, and the driver frantically lashing them with a whip. The carriage was followed by many men on horseback, but owing to the cloud of dust, Ambrose could not determine the number. As they dashed past the cottage the face of the detective was seen peering forward, and as Bob recognized Ambrose on the porch, he waved his hand and shouted, "We've got him,—come on."

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Ambrose had not waited for this invitation, but he untied his horse as the cavalcade swept by, and leaping into the saddle, he soon passed the other horsemen, and in a minute more was beside the carriage, where he could see the cowering half-breed, handcuffed and bound by a rope to the body of the detective. As Ambrose thus looked upon the fiend, who had so cruelly murdered his sister, he extended his clinched fist toward the trembling wretch, and the murderous rage in his heart found vent as he said, "Curse you! You devil!" His words could not be heard above the noise of clattering hoofs, but his clinched extended fist was enough for the men to determine the import of his words, and a roar of angry approval greeted his action. Ambrose at once realized the temper of the horsemen, and restraining his anger, rode up to the front of the carriage.

"We found him in a barn hidden beneath the hay, about six miles from here, near Northwood," shouted Bob. Ambrose looked his appreciation of Bob's successful efforts in a grateful smile, but made no further remarks, and soon without slackening their relentless pace they were galloping through the main street of Raleigh to the jail, followed by an increasing mob of angry citizens, men and women, who, as they caught a glimpse of the prisoner at the side of the well-known detective, yelled, "There he is!—Lynch him! Lynch him!"

As they neared the jail, the crowds of people impeded their progress, but as there was no organized resistance to the law, they fell back before the prancing horses, and soon the carriage stopped in front of the jail. About the steps of the jail was a guard

of a dozen or more armed men, and in the street and square fronting it, was a motley crowd of citizens, yelling and shouting. As the detective and an assistant dragged the half-breed from the carriage, the crowd surged in and closely surrounded the prisoner and his guards.

"Lynch him! Lynch him!" they yelled.

And as several lusty men pushed their way through the crowd, they shouted,—

"Give him to us. We'll save all expense to the county."

The sheriff and his assistants fought back the crowd, and struggled toward the door of the jail with their prisoner, but as the noise of the riot increased, Ambrose saw that Bob and the officers were likely to be overpowered. Pistol shots were heard, and the tumult made the spirited horse of Ambrose uncontrollable. Rearing and plunging, he was guided by the hand of Ambrose toward the struggling officers and their prisoner.

"Back," he cried. "Stand back," and still holding his horse's head in the direction of the jail steps, he struck the plunging animal with his whip, and as its forefeet cleaved the air, the would-be lynchers slunk away and in front of the struggling horse and rider, and the officers bore their prisoner through the open doors of the jail, which were instantly closed and barred behind them.

Ambrose was willing that his horse should be held responsible for this failure of the mob to secure its prey, and though he was looked upon with suspicion by some, one of the most active of the leaders dispelled all doubts by saying,

"Why, it was the gal's brother. He didn't mean

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to interfere with us. His horse was badly scared and he couldn't manage it."

Ambrose rode around to the stables of the Raleigh House, and leaving his horse in the care of an attendant, he returned to the jail. Drawn up about the entrance, he found a dozen men with rifles, and the mob rapidly diminishing, as they saw that nothing but an organized assault with arms would be effective.

Ambrose went into the sheriff's office, but that officer was strangely reserved and non-committal in his replies to the lawyer's remarks, but Bob Wrenn, with a wink which only Ambrose saw, said, "Judge, your horse's fit came on at jest the right time. It saved me an' the other men from using our guns."

Ambrose sought Adolph at the hotel, and 'phoned out to Berylwood to advise his wife and Mrs. Weedahl of his safety, and of the fact that the prisoner was in jail. He then remained in the hotel exchange until nine o'clock that evening, and though the exchange was full of excited people, whose only topic of conversation seemed to be the murder, there were no open threats of violence, save from a few loud-mouthed, half-drunken men, whose condition of intoxication alone attracted attention, and whose maudlin words created a sentiment, the reverse of which they hoped to inspire. Bob at length came in, and seeking out Ambrose and his clerk, he said,—

"I say, judge, what do you think of the sheriff? He acts to me as if he was on the fence."

"I feel pretty sure of it, Bob," said Ambrose. "Tell me, what have you noticed?"

"Well, he told the men to-night that if a lynch-

ing party stormed the jail, they must not fire on them under any circumstances, unless he gave the order to do so."

"And he will be very slow in giving the order," said Ambrose.

"And he has ordered the men to load with blank cartridges," said Bob, "and says that no blood must be shed, except as a last resort."

As Bob made these statements, a momentary expression of helplessness appeared on the face of Ambrose, but it was quickly succeeded by one of inflexible determination, as he said, "Well, if the sheriff desires to evade his duty, it is an easy matter for him to do so, and we cannot convict him of wilful negligence, if the prisoner is lynched. But what you say makes my duty a plain one. I shall try hard to prevent a lynching, Bob. Can I count on you to help me?"

"Yes, judge," said Bob, quietly, "you can count on me," and then after a moment he continued, "But they won't do anything to-night. There is no organization. It takes men with nerve to do these things. A lot of them must get together and make their plans in secret, and then each of these men must go separately and get others, and then they will meet out of town somewhere, and march to the jail between midnight and morning, when everybody is in bed, and the jail guards perhaps asleep. They may not organize at all, but if they do, it won't be to-night."

Ambrose felt that Bob was right, and after instructing Adolph to go to bed, and exacting a promise from Bob that he would telephone him at any hour if he felt that his presence was needed,

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he mounted his horse and rode out to Berylwood where his wife and Mrs. Weedahl anxiously awaited him.

The night passed without further incident, and Ambrose slept peacefully. On the following morning at ten o'clock, in company with his wife and Mrs. Weedahl, he attended the funeral of his sister. The interment took place in the little cemetery near Raleigh, and with the exception of the clergyman who read the burial service, and the undertaker and his assistants, there were no other immediate witnesses, though outside of the gates stood quite an assemblage of people, whose morbid curiosity had prompted them to watch the burial of the murdered woman.

In silence, the funeral party rode back to Berylwood, and late that afternoon, Ambrose was advised that Adolph wished to speak with him over the 'phone.

"Come to the Raleigh House."

These words of his stoical clerk were spoken quickly and in a tone which promptly and fully interpreted by Ambrose, rendered discussion and questioning unwise, and his only reply was,—

"I will come at once."

"Now, Ambrose, where are you going?" said his wife, as she saw the saddled horse again waiting her husband.

"To the Raleigh House," he replied, "and I may stay there all night. But don't be alarmed, if I should not return this evening; there is no danger. I shall do no fighting," and he smiled, as he leaped upon his horse and rode away.

On arriving at the Raleigh House, Ambrose found Adolph and Bob awaiting him.

"I think we're going to have some callers at the jail to-night," said Bob, after the trio had found a secluded place in which to converse unnoticed by others.

"I expected this," said Ambrose.

"The whole mess is going wrong," said Bob, as he pulled from his pocket a morning local newspaper, and then in a tone of disgust, he added, "Jest look at that advertisement," and Ambrose read the published announcement that a certain clergyman of Raleigh would preach upon the subject of the murder and the question, "Should the murderer be lynched?"

"Now," said Bob, "the devil got into a pulpit this morning, and he has raised hell. That young hair-brained scandal-monger, who put that ad in the paper to draw a crowd, has done an awful lot of mischief. I went there and heard the sermon. It wasn't so much what he said, as what he did and what he meant, that has made the trouble. The mob only needed a preacher to tell them that lynching was right. I listened around a little after meetin', and from the way the deacons talked, I guess some of them went home to get their clothes-lines."

"I see," said Ambrose, "the opposition of the sheriff won't amount to much now."

Bob, then, at the request of Ambrose, went into detail as to all he had seen and heard. He related how one of the talkative ringleaders, Ash Corey, by name, had openly boasted that "the half-breed would never see another sun rise."

"Well," said Ambrose, as he arose at the end of the consultation, and his firmly compressed lips and the hard lines of his face added to a quick cat-like motion

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and attitude, showed the power and determination he felt. "Let us go in and get supper. I have work to do to-night, and I shall work as I never worked before."

After they had finished their meal the trio seated themselves on the hotel porch where they could look down the street to the jail and the open square beyond. The night was still and oppressively warm. There was no moon, and though the stars were shining brightly, the darkness, owing to the dense shade of many trees, was intense. The sombre gloom was here and there broken by widely scattered arc lights, whose distant brilliancy only emphasized the darkness of other localities. The jail was an old-fashioned structure of stone, with a high stone wall around it, extending from either side of the front, and situated back from the street overlooking the square. At the side and the rear was a grove of large trees, and over the steps at the entrance an arc light was burning. In front were several armed guards pacing to and fro, and who were relieved at regular hours during the day and night. In a small building adjoining the jail was the sheriff's office and home.

The jail thus presented quite a formidable appearance, and Ambrose was sure that if the sheriff desired to defend it successfully, he could do so with a very small force.

For several hours our hero and his companions remained upon the porch peering through the darkness, noting every passing group of men and every unusual sound. Adolph and the detective conversed in low tones, but Ambrose, silent and apart from them, nervously turned in his chair, and at

intervals paced to and fro upon the porch. The congregations of churches returned to their homes. The streets were practically deserted; vivid flashes of lightning were frequently seen, and occasional peals of thunder were heard, whose roar, increasing in volume, heralded the approach of a storm.

"Wait here for me," said Ambrose; "I am going over to call on the sheriff."

As Ambrose passed the jail guards, they stood still, and at once recognizing him as the man on horseback of the previous day, they eyed him curiously.

"Good-evening, sheriff," said Ambrose, as he noticed that official standing in the doorway of his office.

The sheriff acknowledged the greeting of Ambrose with distinct coolness, and pulling out his watch noted the time.

"It is a few minutes past eleven, sheriff," said Ambrose. "What time will your lynching party arrive?"

"I don't know of any lynching party, judge," said the sheriff, looking out at the approaching storm.

"Then," said Ambrose in clear but aggressive tones, "why do you look at your watch? Were you not wondering as you stood in the doorway whether they would come before the storm or afterward?"

The sheriff made no reply, but gazed intently at his questioner.

"Well, then, sheriff, if you don't know that a lynching party is coming here to-night, let me tell you that they are on the way, and will surely be

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here. Now what do you intend to do when they arrive? Let us understand each other, sheriff. I am here alone and unarmed and shall remain so. I have no intention to use force in upholding the law or in breaking it. Now suppose a mob appears here and demands the body of the half-breed, what will you do?"

"I shall certainly refuse to give it to them."

"And then suppose they rush upon your guards?"

"My men will fire at them, using blank cartridges. They will at first fire over their heads."

"And then of course they will at once be overpowered by the mob, who will enter the jail and seize the prisoner."

"Well, judge," said the sheriff, "I shall use what force I can in defending the jail, but I won't shoot down a lot of the citizens of Raleigh. If there is any shooting to be done, the governor should send the militia. I have neither the men nor the inclination to do so."

Ambrose now saw that the sheriff's pretense of defending the jail would be the merest sham, so after a moment's silence in which that official eyed him with furtive glances, he said, "Sheriff, will you let me defend the prisoner alone, unarmed, with bare hands?"

The sheriff laughed coarsely, as he said,—

"Why, yes, I suppose so. How will you go about it?"

"Go in your office and stay there; order your guards inside the jail, out of sight; leave the front doors of the jail wide open and allow me to stand on the steps alone."

"And then?" said the sheriff inquiringly.

"And then," said Ambrose, "when the mob arrives, I will demand their attention and talk to them. If, when I have finished what I have to say, and they still insist upon the prisoner's life, I will turn them over to you, and right here I promise you I will in no way condemn what you do."

The sheriff, silent and thoughtful, at length said,—

"I can't understand why you condemn me now, judge. I don't understand why you want to spare the life of a devil that murdered your sister. Why should you pose as a moralist? Why should you berate and threaten me as you did over the 'phone yesterday? I don't think I am any worse than you. I didn't do any more harm in sinning with your sister than you did in sinning with my ex-wife. Birds of a feather should flock together, judge."

Ambrose winced at this cutting remark of the sheriff, but without attempting an answer in detail to the sheriff's accusation he replied,—

"There are exceptions to all rules, sheriff, especially to the old saw you have just quoted. Some of those exceptions are, two conceited men, two pretty women, and two rascals like you and me."

"Well," said the sheriff, "I'll consent to what you want, but in the future don't turn me down."

It was now past midnight, and the Sabbath day was over. Ambrose and the sheriff, as they eagerly peered up and down the dark streets, saw torch-lights in several directions. At that moment, Bob and Adolph came running toward them.

"They are coming," said Bob, "coming from every direction to meet here."

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“ Call in your guards, sheriff; open the jail doors, and you, Bob and Adolph, wait in the sheriff’s office,” said Ambrose, and as the sheriff hastily complied with this order, Bob and Adolph stood still, looking at the lawyer with consternation and dismay.

“ Do as I tell you; I cannot explain now. I will call if I need you,” and the clerk and detective in silent wonder obeyed the order.

At several near-by points, in different localities, a profusion of torchlights remaining stationary were plainly seen, and then, as if obeying a pre-concerted signal, a horde of men rushed to the jail. On the steps of the jail, standing erect and motionless, Ambrose awaited them. With bared head and folded arms, he stood beneath the arc light; his auburn hair gleaming in luxuriant profusion, as it fell over his brow. Cool and resolute, the whiteness of his face was the only visible indication of the deep emotion that filled his heart.

At a distance of fully fifty feet from the steps of the jail the mob paused, evidently for the purpose of consultation. Some wore masks; others had colored handkerchiefs tied over their faces below the eyes. Some carried guns; others clubs. One man carried a coil of stout rope with a noose at the end; others had a heavy stick of timber, evidently intended for a battering-ram to break in the jail doors. As this motley crowd of law-breakers in number about three hundred, stood for a few minutes in excited discussion, as if undecided what to do, the smoking torchlights shedding a dim light upon their partly concealed features, Ambrose sadly felt as he surveyed them, that they

represented a public sentiment so depraved that its frequent open expression and far-reaching influence made self-government by such people a question for wonder, and the perpetuity of our nation one of grave uncertainty. Ambrose had fully decided upon what he should say and do, and had accurately anticipated the effect of his action upon the mob. He felt that a plea for Christianity would be unheeded; that an appeal to their manhood and honor would be ridiculed. This remarkable man, sensitive as he was to every emotion of the human heart, to every pulse beat of humanity; a master of satire, invective, finesse, ridicule and subtle pleading, knowing the wondrous power of his magnetic personality, which he had tested so many times before judge and jury, looked upon his prospective audience with a feeling of conscious power that was born of his sense of justice and his inflexible determination to win. He felt that he could command their attention; that he could force into their degraded minds a sense of shame, and that a drastic impeachment of their morality, as individuals, was the only proper method of dealing with a body of men, whose purpose was to commit a deliberate murder.

The mob had not expected the reception that thus awaited them; the absence of guards; the open doors of the jail; no signs of resistance anywhere; one lone, peaceful looking man standing on the steps with folded arms and bared head. What did it mean? A trap? They were suspicious, and could not understand. Had the prisoner been spirited away? Where was the sheriff? Was the jail open for their inspection? Was this re-

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spectable-looking man in charge to show them around?

Their embarrassment was ludicrous, and Ambrose, as he noted it, felt amused; he smiled. As the mob noticed this action of the silent guardian of the county prison, some of them gave vent to roars of laughter, and they moved close to the jail steps; some laughing, others with mutterings of anger. The threatening storm seemed to be spending its force a short distance away and came no nearer, though the lightning and thunder seemed almost above them. At the front of the steps they again paused, and here Ambrose, stepping forward, raised his hand for silence, and in an attitude that seemed to command attention and respect, his fine tenor voice in which seemed thrown all the deep emotions of his heart and soul, rang out upon the still night air, as he said,—

“Citizens of Raleigh! Coming here as you do to murder a prisoner, now confined in this jail, you find no one to oppose you but me, an unarmed man. The doors are open; the prisoner you seek is there. I am responsible for this state of affairs, and as the guards were removed and these doors thrown open at my request, I demand in return that you recognize me, at least to the extent of listening to what I have to say.

“I, the brother of the prisoner’s victim, am a lawyer in regular practice, and I promise you that the prisoner shall not escape. It is my right far more than yours to say how and when he shall be punished. But you, murderers at heart as you are, have no right to be here. Such men as you are unworthy to stand even the shadow of a court of

law, and you know and feel this more than I do. I should indeed pity the man, good or bad, who in a court of law, asks for justice with you for his jurymen. Why are your faces masked? Tell me your names? Why do you come here at midnight instead of noon? I'll tell you why. It is because honest men are in bed, and because the darkness of night will veil the shame you feel when, as traitors to decency, you would break the laws of your country, and the law of that God above, who hath said 'Thou shalt not kill.'

"You claim that the prisoner will perhaps escape punishment; that through some technicality of the law he will be freed; that our judges will be false to their duty. But you know full well that the meaning of the law's delay is that God's justice shall prevail, and that a criminal, such as the prisoner, whose life you demand, shall feel in his conscience the torments of hell, as he realizes his crime; that he shall suffer over and over again in imagination the horrors of a terrible death, which he knows awaits him. Why should you assume that your miserable conception of justice is superior to that of the judges, whom you have placed in power to punish offenders such as these? Why should you be guilty of such folly as to assume that a crime such as this man has committed will go unpunished? Let us admit that judges make errors at times. They are not infallible. But when as a price of their continuance in office, they must bow to public sentiment such as this, what can you expect from the law? What justice have you the right to expect at their hands?

"This morning in yonder church, a clergyman,

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who had deliberately advertised his intended action for the purpose of personal notoriety and filthy gain, chose for the subject of his discourse the horrible murder of my sister, and thus as a scandal-monger of most degraded type, virtually made her outraged corpse a stepping-stone to his fame. He inspired you to this violence by indirect approval of lynch law, by his insidious, subtle teaching, by inflaming your honest indignation. Is he with you to-night? or is he,—the most despicable hypocrite I can imagine, a clergyman, false in his pulpit, slinking at home and cowardly gloating as he anticipates at a safe distance the murder he has inspired? And I am informed that his congregation, intelligent men and women, voiced their approval of what he said. Surely, since the day of the Crucifixion, when the Saviour of mankind was murdered on the cross, the devil has never before smiled so broadly as when at this dawn of the twentieth century, this morning in the town of Raleigh, he thus witnessed the utter prostitution of a modern church of God to his service. For when the church teaches that lynch law is right, it teaches that the courts of heaven and earth are wrong. Your presence here to-night proves the fact that the white man's loyalty to himself obscures his sense of justice, and it also proves your inconsistency. Why should you stain your hands with the blood of a human monster, whom God gave life that He might visit His wrath upon you for your crimes against His race? For in your unbridled lust lies the cause of the evil that with misguided zeal you are here to remedy, and in your honest duty to woman and God lies the only cure.

“ There are two and one half million half-breed

negroes like the prisoner in yonder cell in this country to-day. Their color proves their parentage and fixes with absolute certainty the responsibility for their illegal existence upon Americans such as you. They are living evidences of the white man's vice. In their conception and birth, they are a mixture of the worst dregs of African and Caucasian blood, and save by the grace of God, they are ever a curse to humanity. God made Africa for the negro, and he should have stayed there. He did not come here of his own volition, and the civil war, with its deluge of blood and tears, was in part the atonement we made for the crimes of our forefathers and their children against his race. Slavery is dead, but its curses will endure for many generations yet to come. We excluded the leprous Chinese and restricted undesirable immigration, but we kept our own worse moral leprosy at home.

"The American negro of to-day is what the American white man has made him. Our treatment of him, at the best, can never be to us a source of pride, and we can remember the past only with shame. If we lynch a half-white negro for his crimes against our women, what punishment should we inflict upon you Americans, who are responsible for two and a half millions of his kind? And should we say it is other than Divine retribution when, for the white man's thousand crimes against the women of his race, he retaliates upon ours with one? Yet shame, oh, shame, upon your American manhood, you take him from the hands of the law to burn him at the stake.

"God sends the lightning that destroys along with the rain that blesses, and this law of nature espe-

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cially applies in the creation of all forms of life. The offspring of pure minds in honest wedlock is the rain that blesses. But when the Almighty gives life to a half-breed fiend such as this, the offspring of the worst passions of a degraded white and a degraded black, it is the lightning of His wrath to destroy, and, if the electric fire of heaven that now flashes before your eyes sometimes destroys a church of God, so directly or indirectly does a curse like this come home to roost.

“ You say this man is an irresponsible beast, and suppose for a moment I admit the truth of what you say, you are now proclaiming yourselves to be equally irresponsible, and if you kill a vicious beast in the field, even in the presence of other beasts, does your action influence the other beasts to better behavior? If you lynch this negro to-night, you will in a few days read of an increased number of crimes similar to that which he has committed ; you will but stimulate crime ; you will be but murderers yourselves, and thus sink to a lower moral level than he, for with your supposed higher intelligence, your responsibility to the law is greater than this. You say you will teach the blacks a lesson, but how much instruction do you yourselves need? If as fathers, you would condone the faults of your well-taught and acknowledged children, how much greater need for mercy should you feel now? And should I say that yonder fiend killed my sister, or should I charge her murder to you?—But, go through the open doors of this jail and take your prisoner. Chain him to the stake ; build your bonfire around him. Wave your torches. Dance about him, and howl in your fiendish glee. Listen

to his shrieks of death agony that mingle with your hoarse bestial yells of triumph, as you thus break the laws of God and man, and as the flames leaping heavenward consume your prey and illumine a scene that would sicken civilization, and exceed in its horrors the worst visions of Dante's Inferno; the worst Orgies of wild African savages;—you should pause, you, best citizens of Raleigh! You, enlightened Americans! Pause, I say, and then you, and you, and you, and you, inquire among yourselves as to the parentage of your victim.

“But no! citizens of Raleigh! no! For thus do the extremes of good and evil meet. Let us rather try to reach that high plane of Christian intelligence, where we can read God's laws through nature's laws, and feel, even in the face of crimes as terrible as this, that God is just. I, who as the victim's brother must, as a result of this awful crime, suffer the keenest sorrow, ask you not to murder this prisoner. Do not stain your hands with the blood of this irresponsible offspring of lust, and thus send a soul to the terrible judgment of a court that later on will demand an answer from you.”

And then though the storm had spent itself near by without breaking upon them, a few drops of rain began to fall. As he went down the steps to where the mob was standing in silence and shame, the man who held the coil of rope threw it to the ground, and then Ambrose in a voice, so sad, so intensely mournful that it swept away the last vestige of the mob's murderous rage, said,—

“Go home! Go home! Go home! Leave him to me. Leave him to God,” and as he uttered these words, a bright flash was seen and the roar of

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a prolonged crashing peal of thunder reverberated through the heavens, as if in solemn warning and approval of what he had said. Ambrose stood with bowed head and in silence, as the mob, all seeming to talk at once, conversed in low tones among themselves, and walked slowly away. As they disappeared from view, Ambrose laughed aloud, and his laugh seemed one in which satire and triumph were weirdly mingled, as he realized the effect of his words upon the mob.

"At last," said he, "and for once in my life at least, I am sure that my interpretation of justice is endorsed by public opinion."

Then picking up the coil of rope which the mob had left behind, and holding the coil in one hand, and the noose in the other, he shook the noose at the window of the cell in which the half-breed was confined, and shouted,

"Now, devil! Die in the hell your guilty conscience makes, a thousand deaths, while I, Ruth's avenger, through the law, choke out your miserable life with this."

CHAPTER XIII

MR. GRILL LOSES HIS TEMPER AND AMBROSE VERY NEARLY LOSES HIS WIFE

MR. GRILL was angry, very angry; he was in fact as "mad" as the proverbial "wet hen," and Mr. Grill, as manager of the Portland, was known to be a man so long-suffering, so patient and courteous at all times, that when we feel as a matter of duty compelled to chronicle the fact that he had completely lost his temper, we also feel that some explanation of the cause is both timely and advisable. Mr. Grill's rage was all the more emphatic and explosive, for the reason that he had nursed it for a week or more without feeling at liberty to "break loose" on the objects of his wrath, or even to pacify his outraged feelings by "telling his troubles to the police," or any other individuals who would be likely to sympathize with him.

Mrs. Weedahl had not been at the Portland since before the fête, and as Mr. Grill had made many notes of matters in regard to which he desired to consult her, he had impatiently awaited her return. But at the time of which we speak, she was at the Portland for a day or so, in order to attend to some pressing matters of business, and in her private office after an early breakfast she was prepared to hear what Mr. Grill had to say.

Mr. Grill, as he began the recital of his troubles,

by his manner gave evidence of a desire to be considerate and fair, to be a gentleman even if he was angry. His face was so red that it indicated apoplexy, and his long neck alternately protruding from and receding into his high collar, suggested a snapping turtle, who would do some damage if he got a good chance, but who realized that the desired opportunity would not materialize.

“Mrs. Weedahl,” he said, “I have been employed by you as manager of the Portland for very nearly two years. Now during that time, Mrs. Weedahl, I have tried with reasonable fidelity to perform the various duties that were required of me. I recognized, Mrs. Weedahl, that your interests were my interests, and have in my work here taken the same interest in your property that I would have taken had it been my own. I have borne with, I think, creditable patience, the insults and abuse to which I have been subjected many times by our guests—Mrs. Weedahl,—I have endured their unreasonable faultfinding and unjust criticism without retaliating, at any time, by offensive language or improper service. I take pride in the fact that I am patient and discreet; that I am tactful and considerate. But, Mrs. Weedahl, at the end of the year I must inventory the stock; I must prepare balance sheets in which I show you the results of my work in dollars and cents. It is my privilege to regulate many things that are wrong, but there are some troubles, which for good and sufficient reasons, are beyond my power to remedy. There are times when I must come to you, though now on the score of modesty, I regret that it is necessary to do so. A hotel manager’s patience, Mrs. Weedahl, ranks

next to that of Job, but there is a limit to it,—a last straw, pardon me, but here it is,” and Mr. Grill held up for inspection a piece of broad white tape, from which suspended sixteen of the dining-room napkins, one corner of each napkin being sewed to the tape. —“ They are all stamped with the Portland stamp,” said Mr. Grill, and then he waited in silence while his mistress inspected the trophy he held up to her gaze.

Mrs. Weedahl, as a shrewd business woman, was usually imperative in manner and speech when talking to her manager, but when she saw that he was justly angry, she was careful not to lose her own temper, and so now she simply smiled, as she looked wonderingly at the exhibit of Mr. Grill.

“ But what does this mean, Mr. Grill? Where did you find those napkins, and why are they sewed on that tape? ” she said.

“ They were found in a wardrobe in the apartments of Mrs. M’Garrité,” said Mr. Grill. “ Mrs. M’Garrité doubtless forgot that she had left them where the maid would be likely to find them. You see, Mrs. M’Garrité is very thin, and the weather being warm —— ”

Mr. Grill was here interrupted by a loud laugh on the part of Mrs. Weedahl, and he paused, as he noted this evidence of mirth and a deeper color on the face of his mistress.

He continued—“ As manager of the Portland, Mrs. Weedahl, when I make up my inventory at the end of the year I humbly ask of you, am I supposed to go around and locate all of the missing linen? ”

“ No, Mr. Grill,” said the Jewess, “ your curiosity,

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like your patience, must have a limit. Mrs. M'Garrité is under contract for a year, is she not?"

"Yes, madam."

"Very well, make a package of those napkins and send them to Mrs. M'Garrité with a card as follows,—‘Compliments of Mrs. Weedahl and the Portland employees,’" she said; "and now, what have you there rolled up in that newspaper?"

"They are Portland towels," said Mr. Grill; "seven, I believe. They have been used for house-cleaning, etc., and are so black and soiled that they are ruined. They were rolled up in the newspaper and thrown from the window into our neighbor's yard. The guest who did this was evidently ashamed to return the towels to us, but she was hardly careful enough in concealing her identity. The paper in which the towels are wrapped is a copy of the *Christian Herald*, and bears the printed address of Mrs. Brown-Jones. I assure you, Mrs. Weedahl, that Christianity has never before been used as a cloak for anything so black. Shall I charge the towels to her?"

"Oh, no," said the Jewess. "Just make a package of them, using the newspaper as a wrapper, only let the printed address of Mrs. Brown-Jones appear outside, and write beneath it, ‘Compliments of Mrs. Weedahl and employees.’ I am quite willing that Mrs. Brown-Jones and Mrs. M'Garrité should know that their true measure has been taken by the management here, even though it does cost me sixteen napkins and seven towels. What else, Mr. Grill?"

"The new steward is greatly disliked by the help,

because he won't give them the dining-room bill of fare."

"Be sure to keep him."

"The new office girl is very popular with many of the guests, but she is silly and vain. She bemoans the fate that deprived her of a grand ancestral home somewhere, and which dragged her down to the hotel office, but to my certain knowledge she did housework before coming here, and the ancestral home is purely imaginary. The Portland isn't quite good enough for her, and when the guests complain, she tells them things would be different if she could have her way."

"Discharge her at once. Disloyalty is only another name for treachery. We often meet with people who remind us of the apples when they took their first and only swim. What else, Mr. Grill?"

"I recently loaned to Mr. Jordan six champagne glasses, as he had a little party in his rooms. The next day my attention was called to the broken bottles and glasses in our neighbor's yard, where he had thrown them from the window. I sent up and asked him to return the glasses, and he reported that he had sent them down-stairs the night before."

"Did you sell him the wine?"

"No, but I iced up the three quarts of champagne for him."

"Charge him fifty cents corkage on each bottle; that will more than pay for the glasses and the ice too. By the way, how did Mr. Jordan like the bottle of Zinfandel wine I sent him with a Cruse and Fils label on it?"

"Why, he thought it was very fine, but he said

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he never did like a Bordeaux Claret, and would rather have a good California Zinfandel."

"And California Zinfandel was what you gave him?"

"Exactly."

"Well, when we hear of such things we can appreciate how confidence sharps feel when they read in the newspaper about a wealthy farmer who came to town and blew out the gas on going to bed. Anything more, Mr. Grill?"

"Why, yes, we have some new guests, Mr. and Mrs. Bleeker. They have been here nearly a month. Mrs. Bleeker rented the rooms. I worked three hours with her, showing her around. She got three glasses of wine and five glasses of ice water. I finally succeeded in pleasing her, but I caught a pair of tartars. Mr. Bleeker came down to the office last evening and casually asked me how much I paid for ice. I told him it cost me four dollars per ton. He then figured out the rate per pound, and said he had a small refrigerator in his rooms, and would like five pounds of ice each day. He said he supposed I would let him have the ice at cost, or five pounds per day for one cent. I told him I would be very glad to do so, only that the bell-boy's shoes needed half soling, and that he insisted on having more or less bread and meat every day. Mr. and Mrs. Bleeker also eat all they can in the dining-room, three times a day, and then what cake and fruit they can't eat they carry to their rooms."

The red eyes of the Jewess gleamed with a strange light, as her manager detailed this statement.

"Be careful not to introduce Mr. Bleeker to Mr. Jordan," said she, "or Jordan will go broke in short order, and won't be able to pay his bills. What a pity I didn't discover Bleeker when he was poor. What a mint he would have been for me, if I had financed him in the cold storage business. Watch Mr. Bleeker very carefully, and see that he don't run his refrigerator with the ice water you send him."

"Mrs. Jordan has made a great deal of trouble for me, by causing me to lose several good chambermaids. They refuse to go to her rooms, and leave. This morning, the maid who attended to her rooms, was called back to remove a lot of pictures and bric-à-brac from her mantel, and do her work over again. The maid is one of the best we ever had, and gives entire satisfaction to other guests. Mrs. Jordan, with a smile, told me at the office that the maid had done her work all right, but that she had showed some little resentment, and so, 'she had called her back to worry her.' The maid gave me notice that she desires to leave, so I told Mrs. Jordan that the maids in the future would work in her rooms subject to my instructions only; otherwise they could not work there at all."

"Is Mrs. Jordan the woman who had so many servants before she came here?"

"Yes, she told several ladies that she had fourteen different maids in six weeks prior to coming here."

"And now she is trying to drive out our maids. Well, Mr. Grill, 'the servant question' is misnamed. It should be called the 'mistress question.' It is ever and ever the same old story. You, as a hotel man, know that when girls are willing to work, it

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is evident that they have some degree of self-respect, and that self-respect should be encouraged, not humiliated. You also know that if they fail to perform their duties, the faults are more certainly remedied through this self-respect than in any other way. A senseless woman like Mrs. Jordan does not realize this, and no amount of argument or explanation would teach her. The servant girl of to-day is the same as the servant girl of one hundred years ago, but the society woman of to-day is a very different creation. She is the product of false teaching; an educated simpleton. She has a smattering knowledge of household duties, acquired perhaps by a ten days' martyrdom in some cooking school, where she learns a little about work, but secretly resolves never to do it. She has a false, silly idea of her own importance, as she has been educated to catch a husband, by appealing to vanity instead of sense, and the husband and working girl both must suffer in consequence. The husband must pay for his folly with cash and disgust, and the working girl is driven to the street, the factory or sweat shop by this chicken brained product of modern civilization. What is wrong with our modern Christian teaching, when it elevates and protects a useless woman, and persistently degrades the one who, as a servant, would earn an honest living? Girls who are protected by the management, will work hard in hotels or factories for less wages and poorer fare, when they won't work in private houses. Why? Housework is considered degrading, chiefly for the reason that a lazy, silly woman is placed on a pedestal to be worshiped, while the social power that thus elevates a fool, makes a slave of struggling

virtue and sense. This condition of servitude whose wrongs crying aloud for justice are thus emphasized and made more intolerable, is perhaps as bad as the negro's bondage before the war, and in this enlightened age it is shameful indeed to realize as a result of such teaching the almost unanimous existence of a sentiment among would-be honest girls, in effect that the degradation of the street is preferable to the degradation of the kitchen. A sensible, industrious maid very quickly measures a lazy and foolish mistress. The hod-carrier will sing merrily at his hard daily labor, if the boss occasionally piles up a few bricks; but if the boss loafs around in an automobile, smoking expensive cigars, the hod-carrier stops singing and goes on a strike. When you are forced to take action in these matters, Mr. Grill, always deal with the men, if possible. A man's senses and feelings, as a rule, are far more intense than those of a woman, and he is usually sensible and reasonable. A worker himself, he is fair and just to a working girl, while his idle wife perhaps excuses her worthlessness by false and bitter denunciation of the defenseless maid, and, also remember this, Mr. Grill, that even though you have many worthy people as guests of the Portland, apartment hotels are often, in a double sense, Retreats for the Helpless, and the only solution of the mistress question."

Mr. Grill sat in thoughtful silence as Mrs. Weedahl expressed her indignation in this unvarnished opinion. He felt that she spoke the truth; that with her keen perception and mature wisdom; her long experience; her close contact with all the varied phases of this great question for so many years, she

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was a competent judge of its rights and its wrongs, and that he, himself, from his experience, was a competent witness to prove the impartial truth of her words. For twenty years as a hotel man, he had lived in daily contact with servant and guest, a medium through which the privileges of the one and the duties of the other were regulated. He had of course occasionally employed worthless servants, and promptly dismissed them. He had noticed how a good servant pleased many sensible people, and was driven to despair by the exacting requirements or the senseless nagging of others. He could appreciate the defenseless condition of the maid in a private home, with the husband absent and the wife in control. He could realize the contempt that familiarity bred, or the disgust that exacting and ignorant attempts at discipline inspired. He knew that the ideal servant was always found working for the ideal mistress, and that a lazy, senseless woman, dishonestly hoping to be free from all irksome responsibilities in order to devote her time to congenial amusements, generally got the imperfect service she merited. The mistress and the servant in the home or in the hotel, were individually the same. Their conditions of existence and responsibility alone were changed. He could understand how in the impregnable position of his society mistress, the servant girl was a yellow dog without friends, and so Mr. Grill, in a sense of honor and justice, felt an absolute conviction that labor troubles, as applied to the servant girl, were chiefly the fault of the mistress, and not of the maid.

As Mr. Grill thus arrived at a conclusion upon this matter of serious import, and left the office of

his mistress, he saw Ambrose coming in from the front with traveling bag in hand and stop at the door of the elevator. With a pleasant "good-morning, judge," the manager hastened toward him, and grasped his hand, while Ambrose returned his greeting with a kindly smile.

"We have missed you for several days, judge," said Mr. Grill. "Have you been out of town?"

"Why, yes, I have been out of town, but not for several days. I went to Raleigh early yesterday morning and expected to get home last evening, but was detained until late, so remained there over night, and have just returned."

"The negro, I suppose, is still in jail?"

"Yes, he will stay there safely now, I think, until September, when he will be tried. I assisted the prosecuting attorney of Prescott County at the hearing yesterday, and the negro was committed without bail, to await the action of the grand jury. Last evening I went over the case with the prosecuting attorney, and will assist him at the trial, as there is no doubt but that the negro will be indicted."

"I read your speech in the newspaper, judge, and a full account of the affair. I understand negroes pretty well. I have employed them in hotel work for many years. The full-blooded, black negro is usually very good or good for nothing, but the half white creation is always dangerous. Your success in preventing a lynching was remarkable. You played a bold game and won, but the truth you told was sad indeed."

A shadow of displeasure appeared on the face of the lawyer, and the gesture he made was one of polite dissent.

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"I don't know," said Ambrose, thoughtfully, "that I am at all pleased with the publicity that has been given the matter, though of course my action and the publicity that followed were practically unavoidable. I greatly regretted the necessity for my words, but more than all else, did I deplore the misguided sentiment that inspired the mob, and the condition of public morality that gave a convicting influence and force to the harsh words I uttered. I am pleased to note that the Press in giving the matter publicity, has refrained from editorial comment. The truth harshly told should ever inspire thoughtful silence and stimulate a quiet heartfelt desire for moral betterment. If this should be the only result of the shame inspired in the mob, and which sent them to their homes, I shall feel that my effort was not in vain. But if it provokes a sensational public discussion and unseemly controversy, I shall feel that my labor has been lost."

Ambrose here quietly excused himself, and smiling pleasantly at Mr. Grill, took the elevator to go to his room, and shortly after this he went down to his office.

After the death of his sister and the startling events that had followed close upon her tragic end, our hero, naturally silent, thoughtful, and frequently the victim of a melancholy that rendered him incapable of rational effort, sought vainly for peace of mind and consoling diversion. The conflicting emotions of love and duty at war in his breast, were ever a fountain of inspiration for some device that would dull the pangs of conscience and at the same time, with relentless precision, they pointed out to him the higher obligations of his manhood, and so,

during these balmy days of June, when all nature was teeming with joyous life, he would sit in his office moody and morose ; for at this season, but little business occupied his time. He would go to his home at night suffering in silent misery. If Annette called at his office, her bright smile would, for a time, dispel the clouds of gloom that held him in thrall, but he thus became petulant and irritable, and existence was but another name for misery. The sable goddess of Lethe had fixed her ebon throne in his heart, and with stygian power and vampire seductiveness, now wielded her leaden sceptre to silence the repeated calls by which duty sought to awaken his slumbering conscience. Then feeling that earthly happiness meant only the gratification of the senses, like a poor inebriate, he plunged to deeper woe by yielding to the tempter. But it was now near the end of June, and on the afternoon of a warm, oppressive day that, though he was all unconscious, was destined to be a long day to be remembered,—Ambrose had returned from his luncheon, and seated at his office desk, idly looked over the newspaper he held in his hand. Adolph had just finished some manuscript upon which he had been engaged. He arose from his desk and putting on his hat, said casually, “ I am going over to Robbin & Groves to return this testimony in the case of MacFarland versus Bromley. I have made a copy of it.”

“ Very well,” said Ambrose, as he looked up from his paper. Then as soon as Adolph was gone, he crushed the paper in one hand and leaning forward, idly drummed upon his desk with the other. He sat thus for several minutes, in what seemed to

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be an attitude of indecision. As he stopped drumming the desk with his fingers, the silence was broken only by the businesslike ticking of his office clock. The noise it made annoyed him, and to his disturbed senses it grew louder and louder, until he felt that the ticking must possess some meaning, which by its intensity it sought to convey to him. So with morbid impatience he exclaimed, "Oh, yes, I understand. You mean that you are ticking away the hours that will never return. You are exulting over the foolish error I made by which I tied myself and irrevocably pledged my honor to endure a life of misery. You are laughing in ridicule as you witness the struggle between duty and inclination. You proclaim with the voice of fate that I can obtain the happiness I seek only by the sacrifice of all honor, virtue and respectability; that I can become an animal, but must cease to be a man. You mean that this condition of my life must remain as it is to the bitter end. You mean that after time comes eternity, and then you say, 'What-what? What-what? What-what?' You mean that I should be happy while I may; that life is what we choose to make it; that happiness or sorrow is a question only of our own volition; that earthly joy stops at the threshold of him who opens his door as it passes. You mean," and here with a deep drawn sigh and a vacillating expression of weakness on his face, like that of the poor inebriate who has firmly resolved to reform, and who yields to the first appeal to his senses, made by the tempter, he walked to the telephone, and taking down the receiver, said, "Give me the Richelieu, please."

At a later hour that afternoon in the sitting-room of Annette's apartments, as with languid ease, he peacefully rested in a reclining chair, occasionally sipping a glass of iced claret, he for the time forgot all else in the wide world beyond, and realized only in the charming smile of his mistress and the soft tones of her voice, a paradise, whose confines were bounded by the four walls of the room.

Annette, seated at the piano and sounding a few cords in subdued harmony with her sweet contralto voice, softly sang an Aria from *Carmen*. Then seemingly in a mood which had inspired the Aria, she played a dreamy Nocturne by Schubert. This was followed by the "Sonate Pathetique" by Beethoven. Then, as her mood changed with the caprice of musical genius, her fingers flew over the keys in a weird Rhapsody by Liszt, followed by a fantasia in C minor by the same master, and then a sensuous Adagio by Chopin. As she concluded these difficult, but charming selections from the old masters, her fingers sounded a few cords as if in petulant indecision, and Ambrose in a soft tenor voice suggested the theme for an impromptu by humming a few bars of a favorite Sonata by Schubert.

Annette improvised from his theme with spirit and brilliancy, her passion for classic music suggesting melodies at once indicative of the true artist. Her lover's voice in suggesting the theme had awakened in her every emotion needful to an inspiring improvisation. She felt his appreciation, for Ambrose listened with quiet delight—charmed, fascinated, as her soul in every note of the music she rendered seemed sweetly in accord and responsive to his own. At last, in his dreamy reverie, he noted

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in the soft tinkling cords the end of the impromptu, and the song birds in the trees just beyond seemed to take up the refrain, as Annette arose from the piano and sat beside her lover.

“There,” said she, “I have played all of your favorite classics and it’s eighty in the shade—now tell me something pleasant.”

Ambrose answered only with a smile, as he toyed with her white pliant fingers, finally raising them to his lips, as a silent expression of his heartfelt appreciation.

He seemed rather strangely quiet and reserved, but Annette attributed this to the oppressive heat of the day, and at length she herself feeling the drowsy influence of the temperature and her lover’s quiet demeanor, ceased her efforts to converse with him, and idly turned the leaves of a book as she looked at him pensively, or responded to the intensity of his gaze with faint but loving smiles. Then with a drowsy sigh of content and peace, she sleepily rested amid the cushions of a divan, while the silken robe she wore partly revealed the graceful outlines of her perfectly modeled form.

Presently she threw aside the book, and leaning forward, placed her white hand upon the arm of her lover, as she looked at him with an expression of anxiety and alarm.

“Why do you look at me so strangely, so intensely, Ambrose, dear? You almost frighten me. Tell me, has anything,—has any one?——”

Ambrose stopped her query by a pleasant reassuring smile, as his hand rested on her head and the soft tresses of her disarranged silken hair fell on his face.

“Why no, it is nothing,—nothing at all,” said he. “I was just wondering if our Elysium beyond the Styx would be like this, or whether we should make the most of the one we have here at the Richelieu. You know Longfellow says, ‘This life of mortal breath is but a suburb of the life Elysian.’”

“Yes,” said Annette thoughtfully, “but you know Whittier says,—

“ ‘Alas for him who never sees
The stars shine thro’ his cypress trees.
Who hopeless lays his dead away,
Nor looks to see the breaking day
Across the mournful marbles play.
Who hath not learned in hours of faith,
That truth to sense and flesh is known,
That life is ever Lord of death,
And love can never lose its own.’ ”

“Well,” said Ambrose, “my imagination is always at work. In fact, I sometimes feel that with me it is a disease. You know the doctors are often called upon to treat diseases which are nothing more or less than ungratified desires.”

“Listen to me, Ambrose, dear. I had such a terrible dream about you last night,” said Annette, as a look almost of terror appeared in her eyes. “We were together in some lonely woods; a dense forest, and you in some way were lost to me. I seemed to hear the sound of rushing waters in a deep ravine below. I called to you, and in the far distance you answered me. I could hear your voice but faintly; then I called again and again, but I could not hear you; then I saw a mist arising, which as it came before my eyes seemed to blind me, and I screamed out and awoke. Oh! it was so terrible! I lay

awake trembling with fear for an hour or more. You don't believe in dreams, do you, Ambrose? What are dreams? Tell me."

"Dreams," said Ambrose, "are the emotions of sleep; just the same as rage, grief and joy are the emotions of our waking hours. They are the anticipations of slumber, and as we may expect possible results from what we do while awake, as we look with open eyes for natural consequences of actual conduct, so in sleep do we feel the anticipated pleasure or pain. It is simply the imagination working overtime. Our dreams in slumber have no more meaning than our dreams of waking hours, and there is no greater degree of certainty that they will be fulfilled."

"I am so glad then that it was only a foolish dream," said Annette with a sigh. "For even a dream that I am parted from you is too horrible to think of."

The only answer Ambrose made to this assertion was a caress, for in his gloomy forebodings the presentiment that their ideal happiness was destined for a tragic ending was ever in his mind, but he sought to further reassure her as she pleadingly, almost tearfully gazed at him, and silently awaited his reply.

"Why, my dear," said he smilingly, "you know there is not even the faintest prospect that we shall be parted. We are doing the best we can; of course my position is different from yours, and comment is almost needless. They say the highest compliment a man can pay a woman is to ask her to be his wife, but alas! this is not a compliment I can pay to you. But I can pay you one which in

my present state of mind is far greater, that above all women in this world you are supremely agreeable to my every sense. You are the most perfect of your sex."

"And you will never tire of me?"

"Never," said Ambrose, and he meant what he said.

"Why?" said Annette.

"Well, surely," said Ambrose laughingly, "you are determined that I shall make an open analysis of my love for you," and then in a serious tone, he continued, "I can only say, that from the hour I first met you I loved you, and I have never since that time felt the slightest jar from anything you have said or done. The affinity between us seems complete. We are congenial in thought and desire. No man can tire of a woman who arouses in him his every sense of sex; who awakens to life every phase of his manhood. Do not misunderstand me," he continued, as he noted a fleeting shadow on Annette's face. "There is no intentional suggestion of sensuality in what I say. I refer only to the higher emotions. Under normal conditions, you would be to me an inspiration to the highest, noblest manhood; as a wife, you would not drag me down; you would uplift and encourage me. In you are embodied all the attributes of perfect womanhood, and you love me as only a perfect woman can love. My love for you is the only love I have ever known, save for my mother and sister, and while it is perhaps even more intense than yours, it is a passion daily nursed in a cradle of grief and hopeless despair. You have said that you would not consent that I should wreck the happiness of another by

giving our love publicity, but if it could be so, I would proclaim you to the world as my pride, my life, my love."

"Ambrose, dear," said Annette, "my love is equaled only by the respect and sympathy I feel for you, and I so often think of your story about the mules. I consider it an unquestionable proof that uncongenial marriages, when endured to the end, are a species of most cruel self-inflicted torture, and virtually mean suicide for the sake of decency. It is no argument to say that the imagination of the mules made them unhappy, for mules do not imagine things, and when they were likely to die of grief under the care of the man who treated them well, but whose presence and association was poison to them, and then grew well and strong under the same care of a man who was congenial to them, I feel that my divorce under even less redeeming conditions was justified by every law of heaven and earth, and even more. See! how happy and well I look now; and if it were not for the shadow that ever stands between me and perfect peace, I feel that this earth, this life, would be a paradise, in which I could not sin, if you were mine alone. Some people, Ambrose, date the beginning of life or the beginning of death from the date of their marriage," and then as her eyelashes drooped before the intensity of her lover's gaze, she said softly, "but I date the beginning of my life from the day that you gave me my decree of divorce."

A prolonged silence followed this confession of Annette; a silence which to both of them was far more expressive than any words that could be spoken; a complete affinity of soul seemed estab-

lished, in which question or comment would have jarred harshly upon the ecstasy of this, the last hour of their earthly Elysium.

For the shadows of approaching twilight began to darken the room, and loath to part, Ambrose at length broke the silence, and said, "You remember, dear, the lines of the poem, 'I am Dying, Egypt, Dying.'"

"Yes," said Annette, in a low tone, "I remember."

"Can you understand how they are marked for immortality?"

"Not as a woman," said Annette with a smile. "Remember I am not Cleopatra."

"And I am not Marc Antony," said Ambrose, "but when with you, I can appreciate his feelings, as he said,

"'Charming sorceress of the Nile,
Light the path of Stygian horrors with the splendor of thy smile.'"

An anxious expression appeared on the face of Annette as she replied,—

"Don't let me be a charming sorceress to you, Ambrose. I am content to be the woman you love. Don't let me exercise any power over you save that inspired by honest affection."

But Ambrose, apparently oblivious to what she said, and gazing upward at the ceiling of the room, as if in communion with his thoughts, and in the business contemplation of some action inspired by the words, went on,—

"'Who when drunk with thy caresses,
Madly threw the world away.'"

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Annette as she noted the preoccupied manner and thoughtful face of her lover, said softly,—

“And if I would consent, dear, would you ‘madly throw the world away’ for me?”

But, alas! this question of Annette was destined to be answered by the events that immediately followed. The telephone bell rang long and sharply.

“Oh, I suppose it is the market man, who wants to tell me that he can’t send the goods I ordered this morning,” said Annette, and she walked to the telephone and took down the receiver.

“Yes, he is here,” said Annette, then turning to Ambrose, she said,—

“It is Adolph. He wants you and says, ‘quick,—quick,—quick.’”

Ambrose sprang to the telephone.

“Yes; well; what is it?” he said sharply. Then jamming the receiver on its hook with a look of horror on his face, he said,—

“Great God! The Portland is on fire, and burning down. My hat! where is my hat?” and he groped everywhere seeing nothing.

But Annette, realizing only the possibility of danger to her lover, sprang in front of him, and as she clasped her hands about his neck the loose sleeves of her thin silken robe fell back to her shoulders, revealing the beauty of her white arms, as they held him in a close convulsive embrace.

“Ambrose! Oh, Ambrose!” she said.

“Let me go, Annette; where is my hat? For God’s sake, let me go,” said Ambrose, in hoarse, gasping tones, as he struggled to free himself from her clinging arms, and then noting her tearful eyes, he went on,—“Think of it, her life is perhaps in

danger, Annette; she is hysterical," and then he pushed aside the trembling red lips that sought to meet his own. "No! no! not now, Annette, I cannot. My wife! my wife! I must, I will go," and then with staring eyes and distorted features, and seeing only his hat which lay upon a table, he grasped her white wrists with sufficient force to release himself, and seizing his hat, as he opened the door, he rushed down-stairs to the street, while Annette, whose anxiety for his safety overcame the stupefaction she felt as a result of his strange conduct toward her, hastily changed her robe for a street costume and hurried after him.

On gaining the street, Ambrose ran at full speed, and quickly traversed the few blocks that separated the Richelieu from the Portland. On arriving there, he witnessed the usual appalling scenes attendant upon a fierce conflagration. The street adjacent to the hotel was roped off, and guarded by police who, with great difficulty, restrained the immense crowd that surged about them. The flames seemed to be bursting from almost every part of the hotel. Ambrose, with frantic energy, tore his way through the crowd, and slipping under the ropes dashed past a policeman, who ordered him back, and running around to the side of the hotel, where he could see the windows of his apartments, he eagerly peered through the shifting clouds of smoke and flame to learn if his wife had escaped. The fire had started and spread so quickly, that many guests had been caught in the rooms unable to escape, and at the rear end of the building some firemen, with a long ladder, were engaged in the rescue of several people, who assembled at a window of one of the upper

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floors, and who were frantically beseeching for aid. An iron fire-escape was directly beneath the apartments of Ambrose, but the hallways that opened out therefrom were already pouring forth volumes of smoke and flame. As Ambrose located his rooms, he saw his wife leaning from a window, and he at once realized that she had failed to reach the fire-escape from the hallway.

She recognized her husband at the moment he saw her, and extended her arms piteously to him in mute appeal. Ambrose started forward, but a fireman, divining his intention, grasped his arm in a vice-like grip. Realizing that he could not escape from the grasp of the fireman, and that argument would be of no avail, Ambrose turned upon him, and with a terrific blow in the face sent the man reeling backward. Then rushing to some water-soaked bedding that lay upon the ground, he seized a blanket that was dripping wet and started up the fire-escape, using the blanket to shield him from the smoke and flames that burst from doors and windows. As he struggled upward, he realized, as did his wife, that she must jump a distance of about fifteen feet to the iron landing of the fire-escape beneath her window, but she waited for her husband to reach this spot that he might prevent her from being injured, as she fell. Ambrose waved his hand to her as he reached the second landing, and his cheering words of encouragement reached her ears above the roaring flames, but at that instant a volume of smoke and flame burst from the window at which she was standing, hiding her from view. In another instant, with her clothing in a blaze, she fell from the window, headlong

to the iron landing below. As her limp and fainting form struck the grated floor, her husband was at her side, and extinguished the flames that burned her clothing with the blanket. Then he gathered her in his arms, and began his perilous descent. The cheering roars of the crowd below fell on his ears, as with set teeth and straining muscles he struggled with his unconscious burden. A huge stream of water, directed against the walls above his head by the firemen, fell in showers upon him as he went down the fire-escape, and though he himself was badly burned, the splashing water, as it fell upon them, saved them both from greater injury. As he reached the ground, reeling from pain and exhaustion, strong arms reached out to him and both he and his unconscious wife were carried to the hospitable parlor of a near-by neighbor, where willing hands ministered to them and sought to allay their suffering.

Through the open window of the parlor, a cheering crowd proclaimed its appreciation of the gallant rescue he had made, and could not be silenced, but Ambrose regarded this demonstration of approval with grim indifference. Presently Mr. Grill burst into the room, and grasping our hero's hand, joyfully directed his attention to the enthusiasm of the crowd, but Ambrose, with the habitual impatience that ever marked his character of quiet reserve, said, "I don't see why they should make so much noise and fuss over what I did. It was my wife whom I went up the fire-escape to save."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

THE house to which the wife of Ambrose was carried on the afternoon that the Portland was destroyed by fire, was destined by force of circumstances to be her home and that of her husband as well, for several weeks that followed. She had been terribly injured both by frightful burns, chiefly about the face and head, and also by a fractured arm, as well as severe internal injuries, which she had sustained by falling on the iron landing of the fire-escape. She was so badly injured, that when she had been restored to consciousness and her wounds were dressed, her condition was such that any attempt to remove her from the room to which she had been carried would have been a matter of certain death ; so Ambrose made arrangements by which, with the constant attendance of trained nurses, his wife should receive every possible attention and comfort. For many days her life was despaired of, but at length a slight improvement in her condition was perceptible, and the physician informed him that there were strong hopes for her recovery, though considerable time would be required to heal the burns about her face and hands, and that the scars would remain. Ambrose, from information thus obtained, realized that if his wife should live, she would be almost unable to use her hands, and by reason of the hideous scars on her

face, she would be an unsightly object of pity for the remainder of her life.

During this period of trial and suffering, Ambrose was a devoted husband. He left his wife only when pressing business demanded his attention. Day and night he was at her bedside, or within the sound of her voice, if she needed him. The sight of her helpless form, swathed in cruel bandages, inspired in him pity and remorse. He responded to her moans of pain with loving words of kindness and consolation. But though his devotion to his wife, noted by others, was the subject of unstinted praise, he felt that he should receive no credit for it. He felt that he was acting a part that he was only with fitting consistency living up to the lie he told when he first said to her, "I love you"; that he was but meeting the requirements of duty and decency. As a husband he had been a consistent actor for many years, and he felt that if any credit was due him, he was willing that it should be accorded him only for the time that had elapsed, and by that God alone who knows the secrets of our inmost hearts. He was as indifferent to the praise he received for being a good husband, as he was to the cheers that had greeted him when he carried his wife down the fire-escape through smoke and flame to safety. He had done and was doing only what was expected of him. He had at the age of thirty-three made his marriage vows with the sober judgment of mature manhood, and ten years later had broken them with the same deliberate premeditation. In his inherited honor and pride, he had felt that no sacrifice would have been greater than the admission that with mature

wisdom he had deliberately made at one and the same time an unhappy marriage, and the most serious mistake of his life, but he had fallen only when for the first time in his life he had been consumed by an overpowering passion of love. A love that, in its reciprocal joy, had torn down and trampled upon the flimsy cords that bound him to an assumption of decency, and forced him to fulfil the destiny to which this only love of his manhood called him.

It is but fair to say of our hero, as we thus coldly begin to analyze him at a most critical period of his life, that he was at heart honest in both his sense of duty and his love. Under existing conditions, the power of one seemed equal to that of the other, and Ambrose, as he thus devoted himself to his wife, felt that he was simply waiting for some unseen power to blind his senses and lead him to happiness, either by the path of duty or the path of infamy. How, when and where, it mattered not, though he seemed to feel in a hope born of love, that Annette would solve the problem, as alas! by the irony of a relentless fate, she was destined to do.

So Ambrose kissed his wife reverently; he smiled upon her; he cheered, he caressed her, and one day, as he sat by her bedside, and she felt some momentary ease, though she lay stiffened and helpless beneath the bandages that concealed her cruel wounds, she said with the mist of joy in her eyes,

“You are so good to me, dear. Kiss me.”

Her husband did as she requested him.

“You came in to see me eight times last night, when you heard me moan, my poor, tired husband.”

"Well," said Ambrose with a smile, "I didn't know you were keeping tab on me. Are you sure it was eight times?"

"Yes, I always remember it when you thus show me how kind and loving you are."

Ambrose again felt the sting of remorse as he replied,—

"Well, dear, my acts of loving kindness to you in the past have not been so numerous that you would have trouble in remembering them."

"You have always been a good husband, dear, but I suppose I expected too much. I drove you from me. I did not know. I do know now," and again the tears stood in her eyes. "Forgive me." Here she attempted to raise her arms to him, but as they fell at her side, she gave a moan of pain.

"There is nothing for me to forgive, dear. Let the past be forgotten," said her husband, and his own eyes were dim with grief, as he spoke.

"I know," said the wife, "you have always loved me though you did not tell me, and when I saw you, my brave husband, coming after me through the flames, my last doubt of your love was gone forever, and you do love me, don't you, dear?"

"Why of course I love you," said Ambrose in a tone somewhat jocular. "If you question it again, I will call and see you sixteen times to-night."

The plaintive, pathetic gaze of his wife, as he said this, was fixed upon him inquiringly, and a fleeting shadow appeared on her face which her husband interpreted as a tacit remonstrance to his untimely levity, and so he stroked her hair caressingly.

"I don't think I have ever understood you, Am-

brose, dear," she said. "I have always grieved because I was not pretty, and now——" Here her tears flowed freely, and sobs choked her voice, as she said, "You will always have a wife who is hideous and unsightly; an ugly, repulsive looking cripple, and you——" She could say no more, for violent grief prevented utterance, and her husband in silence kissed away her tears.

"But you will live, dear, and you will love me, and I shall love you, the same as of old. Your appearance will make no more difference to me in the future than it has in the past, for the only beauty that will hold a man in constancy and devotion to his wife is the beauty of her soul; the purity of her heart." And Ambrose, as he uttered these words with a silent prayer, wonderingly felt that they were not actually deceptive and unreal, though an impulse of pity had inspired them.

She smiled joyously through her tears, as her husband thus consoled her, and said,—

"It is the thought that you loved me, that I was sure of it at last that has made me live. I want to live if only to be to you the wife I ought to be. I am so happy, so contented, Ambrose, dear. I can bear the pain so much easier now," and she smiled brightly, as a moan escaped her fevered lips.

"Well, dear, you must not talk any more now. I will go in the next room, and look over the paper. Take a nap if you can. Perhaps I may doze a little myself, if you don't need me."

"Yes, dear, sleep if you can. I won't call you, and the nurse can get me anything I may want. Kiss me again before you go."

Ambrose, as he went into the adjoining room,

closed the door softly after him, and walking to a window, looked out over the green yard beyond. The mist that stood in his eyes was burned by the fever of his grief, and the tears could not fall. As he thus, with dimmed gaze, looked down to the yard below, he noted, with morbid indifference, the antics of two kittens, who with uplifted tails, alternately chased each other over the lawn, or in close embrace and with open jaws rolled over and over in pretended combat. In the topmost boughs of a tall tree some feathered songster, with shrill, piercing notes, warbled out his song of joy. It mattered not to him that song-birds warbled in the bright sunshine, or that all nature was full of bounding joy—for, when in the heart of man all the senses are dead to the inspiring influences of purity—then hell begins.

Ambrose remained standing at the window for some time. Then turning, with a deep sigh, he threw himself into an easy chair, and closed his eyes, not for sleep, but for the purpose of reflection. As he thus reclined at ease, he heard the door-bell ring, and a few minutes later a soft tapping was heard at his door. As he opened it, a maid said to him,

“A lady in the parlor, sir, desires to see you. When I went to the door, she first inquired how Mrs. Pierce was, and I told her she was still in bed, but was better. Then she asked to see you, sir.”

“Did she give you her name or a card?” said Ambrose.

“I asked for her name, sir, and she said, ‘Miss Borden.’”

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"Tell the lady I will come down in a minute," he said.

About ten days had elapsed since Ambrose had so hastily parted from Annette at the Richelieu, and with the exception of a telephone message giving his address and a statement as to existing conditions, delivered to her by Adolph, they had not seen or heard from each other.

Annette, in following Ambrose to the fire, had arrived in time to see him bear the unconscious form of his wife down the fire-escape. She had then returned to her home, and awaited in silence for some further message from her lover. Ambrose, on his part, had felt that in sending his only message through Adolph, he had fulfilled the requirements of decorum and that the state of affairs subsequently had raised a question of ethics too abstruse for him to solve, either as a lawyer or a lover. So, as we have stated, in doing what he conceived to be his duty, he had awaited with an indifference, born only of despair, for the guiding impulse of some unseen and unknown power, and with no thought as to what he should say or do, he hastened down-stairs to meet Annette. As he entered the old-fashioned, over-furnished parlor, somewhat musty from lack of ventilation and from which heavy curtains excluded the light, he saw her standing at a window at the front, and, as ever before, her presence seemed to impart to his senses an indescribable charm, by which the dullest, most commonplace environs were brightened and made to reflect her delicate and subtle power of fascination. Holding aside the heavy lace curtains with one hand, she was looking out to the street, but

at the sound of his footsteps, she turned toward him.

"Annette," said Ambrose, as stepping forward quickly he extended his hand, but the fleeting shadow of a smile that appeared on his face was but a ghastly expression of expiring hope, and emphasized, if possible, the sweet sadness that seemed a fixed expression on the face of his mistress.

Annette made no reply to the greeting of her lover, but the guiding impulse that Ambrose had awaited was promptly inspired by her action in quickly drawing her hand from his, after a scarcely perceptible responding pressure.

Then seated by the window, they gazed at each other for several minutes in unbroken silence. It was to each of them a moment fraught with meaning so intense, that a space of years seemed covered by each measured tick of the tall clock that stood near by. Of what use were mere words at such a time? The suffering that each had endured during the ten days that had passed was plainly visible. Ambrose was shocked at the thin, wan face of his mistress, and Annette turned away her eyes as she noted the haggard, drawn lines of her lover's anxious countenance. Then, resting her arm on the window-sill, she gazed out upon the street, as she made a supreme but successful effort to restrain her tears.

Presently she looked at him again, and in a voice so calm, so quiet, that it seemed expressionless, she said,

"Did I do wrong in coming? The suspense,—you understand, Adolph knows so much. I thought it would be indelicate to ask him."

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As Ambrose listened to this first inquiry of his mistress, he felt that the question she asked in a tone void of feeling, could be responded to only with a similar degree of formality, and yet did not her unhappy face plead more eloquently than words? Though she had withdrawn her hand from his, had she not spoken of her suspense? Had she not expected in thus coming to him that he would say to her so much more than what Adolph would say? And in coming thus unbidden to him, was she not—but here Ambrose paused in his rapid surmising, as he noted the anxious eyes that gazed upon him; but with deliberate, measured words, as expressionless as her own, he replied,—

“It was quite right to come here; better than to ask Adolph. I have looked for you and expected you every day.”

Again they sat looking at each other in silence, and again Ambrose seemed to await some influence that would remove the barrier of conventionality, that Annette, by her bearing, had placed between them, but her manner indicated a desire only that he should accord to her the merciful forbearance and kind consideration she had a right to expect, and her next inquiry was made with a voice whose calm firmness left no doubt in his mind as to what she expected of him on this occasion.

“How is Mrs. Pierce?” she said.

Ambrose looked at her keenly, but his emotion was ill concealed by an assumption of carelessness in manner and attitude. In replying his voice seemed to possess a metallic harshness. It was judicial and impartial in its measured cadence. He seemed to be successfully maintaining a perceptible

equipoise between duty and inclination, as if he would not offend Annette by exhibiting emotion or feeling for his wife, in her presence, and yet he showed a desire to convince her, that in the performance of duty he should not be remiss as a husband.

"Mrs. Pierce is better," he said. "The doctor says she will live." Here he turned away his eyes and looked out to the street as he continued. "He advises me that as soon as she is able to stand the ride, I should take her away from the city. He suggests the mountains where it is cool; so I think we shall go to Northwood, as that is the nearest mountain resort that would be suitable. I have written there for rooms, and hope she will be able to stand the journey in about a week."

Ambrose, as he concluded these remarks, looked at Annette rather pleadingly, but if he felt that his manner and tone had in any way deceived her, he was promptly undeceived a moment later, when, as if in reply to the meaning he apparently desired to convey, more than to the words she uttered, she thoughtfully said, as she gazed at him intently,—

"I saw you that afternoon at the fire when you carried her down the fire-escape. Your noble, self-sacrificing devotion as a husband was superb. It was worthy of you."

Ambrose nervously struck his knee with his hand, as she said this, and turning away gazed from the window. He could not at any time appreciate a reference to this action, and now when he felt that Annette had spoken of it with the palpable intention of rebuking him for the assumed indifference to

his wife he had just shown, he felt a sense of resentment toward her. He felt that she, like the cheering crowd, had credited his conduct to love instead of duty. He was willing that the world should thus estimate him.—A veneer of virtue and respectability was a social and business necessity—but he was so honest with himself, that in his heart he firmly refused the honor thus accorded him. He was unwilling that Annette should thus misunderstand him, for it made him apparently false to her, and yet he was determined that she should respect him; that she should believe and understand him. He was determined that her love and confidence in him should not suffer, even if he sacrificed his self-respect in forcing her to realize his true feelings; so his resentment was plainly indicated, both by his querulous tone and words, as he replied,—

“Would you have respected and loved me more or less had I stood there with the crowd and left her to die?”

The only reply that Annette made was to look at him with a piteous gaze. She raised her hand in remonstrance, as she noted his ill-concealed though repressed anger.

“Tell me,” said Ambrose bitterly, “was I a traitor to you by trying to be a man?”

“I cannot answer you, Ambrose, only to say that as a man you did just what I should have expected you to do. Don’t say any more now. I implore you. It is not the time or place to talk thus,” said Annette, tearfully.

But Ambrose in his desperate resentment, in his humiliation, seemed goaded to a pitch of excite-

ment in which his self-respect was forgotten, as he stood before her and almost hissed in her ear,

“Let me tell you, Annette, you alone; you understand, the truth, the truth, I say. When I risked my own life to save that of my wife, it was from the same sense of duty that prompted my action when I faced the mob to save the life of the devil that murdered my sister. I am not a hero. I am only a man. I lay bare my heart to you, to you alone, Annette. My sense of honest duty has ever been compatible with my conception of justice. This is perhaps the only real virtue I possess, and I will say more than this, even though your love should turn to hatred. Strip my soul of its robe of flesh; give it the breath of eternal life, and in the shades of the world beyond, you will ever find it clinging to the cross of consistency, whether its abode be in Paradise or Perdition.”

Annette arose from her chair, trembling with emotion and nervous dread, and adjusting her veil preparatory to departure, she said inquiringly,—

“She will not know that I called, I suppose?”

“I shall not tell her,” said Ambrose moodily. “She would appreciate the courtesy, but she might possibly question its meaning.”

Annette stood for a moment in seeming embarrassment, as with downcast eyes, she put on her gloves, and then she said, rather abruptly, “I must go, Ambrose—good-bye.”

But Ambrose, without replying, stood between her and the door, and Annette hesitated to extend her hand, fearful that forgetfulness on the part of one or both might result from such action, and yet he did not move from where he stood, but remained

looking at her with an intense and gloomy stare. Presently Annette, with bowed head, stepping quietly to one side, passed him, and Ambrose made no motion to restrain her, but even in the dim light of the room he could see that the blush on her face was so deep that it assumed a purple tinge, as though she felt in thus parting from him that the code of ethics her honest heart had established between them, made of her, in the room beneath that in which lay the suffering wife, a thing of evil who was unworthy of her lover's kiss.

As Ambrose followed her to the hall, he closed the inner vestibule door, and again with his hand on the knob of the outer door he paused for a moment, as she stood silently waiting for him to open it for her, but Annette with honest pleading eyes simply looked at him, as she said,—

“Will you 'phone me occasionally in regard to her condition?”

Ambrose accepted this final remark with an inclination of his head. It was patent to him that their relations for an indefinite future period were definitely fixed. Not a word about seeing him elsewhere. He was merely to 'phone her occasionally, and to say with stereotyped formality that his wife was better or worse, so he quietly replied,—

“I will do as you request.”

As Annette went down the steps, she again said, “Good-bye,” but this time the freedom of the street and the safety she felt in the distance between them prompted her to relax the reserve she had assumed, and she gave him a loving smile as she hastened away; and then Ambrose, as he closed the door and stood silent with a shamefaced consciousness of

his weakness, made a logical and judicial deduction from what had just transpired. By a quick and impartial analysis of the love and relations that existed between himself and Annette, he realized that the honor of her love was greater than his, and as he thus judged her from a standard of morality on a level with his own, but under conditions in which he had less excuse for yielding to weakness than she, the unchangeable conviction of a heaven-inspired truth was forced upon him, as he uttered these words,

“Women, morally, are better than men.”

But now, as the hero of our story returns to his lonely vigil, to his self-imposed task, let us accord to his manhood whatever need of praise is due.

By reason of long association, he was as honest in the respect and regard he felt for his wife, as he was honest in his love for Annette. Absent from temptation, his affection for his wife was shorn of earthly desire; when he caressed her, he felt the purifying influence of her virtue. He kissed her reverently, but his devotion was that of duty. It was to him the fulfilment of the Divine command; the purity of the soul where carnal sin is consumed. He could appreciate the love of a father for his daughter when he cultivates in himself a love for purity, by reason of the protection he extends to the virtue of his child. As for his wife, the silent influence of her purity, shorn of the bitter recriminations of the past, and rendered pathetic by her helplessness, was now at times stronger than his inclination to sin. Her pure love and virtue as a wife, made sin repugnant to him. He thus unconsciously fanned into a flame the smouldering embers

of inherent virtue that had been almost extinguished by the evil influences that had dominated his life since childhood ; a flame which as the Divine light of a love that duty and honor inspired, consumed evil, and made passion subservient to the nobler manhood to which he was uplifted by this undefiled creation of God, and to whom he owed the duty of a husband.

And so as the days glided by, and he noted the improvement in his wife's condition, he fixed upon a day for her removal to the mountains. Comfortable rooms had been engaged at a modest hotel, and when the day for departure arrived, the wife, assisted by her husband and a nurse, was removed in safety to Northwood, where it was hoped that the pure, cool mountain air would prove so agreeable a change, that her impaired vitality, a result of the shock and terrible injuries she had sustained, would be in a great degree restored.

Another ten days had elapsed since Ambrose had seen Annette, and it was now past midsummer. In accordance with her request, he had on several occasions called her up by telephone from his office, and briefly advised her of the state of affairs, and at no time did he ask to see her or depart from the formalities of ordinary social friendship. But now located as he was at Northwood, he arranged to come to the city only when urgent business made it necessary ; so after a period of about two weeks, when he had not been at his office for several days, he came in one morning quite early in response to a letter which Adolph had sent him, calling his attention to the unexpected and urgent developments

of an important case. After a brief discussion of business matters, Adolph said,—

“Mrs. Caldwell telephoned yesterday and asked me when you would be in town. I told her I had written you in regard to an urgent business matter, and that you would surely be here to-day.”

“Did she send any message?” said Ambrose.

“No,” said Adolph. “Only that she would send her maid here with a note for you before noon with reference to a matter which you would understand.”

“Very well,” said Ambrose, and, seated at his desk, he was soon absorbed with the work before him. A little before noon the faithful maid of Annette arrived, bearing the expected missive, and as Ambrose asked her to be seated, he nervously tore open the dainty, perfumed envelope she had given him. The letter was very brief, and Ambrose as he read it over and over again, coughed nervously, passing his hand over his face, which grew red and pale in turn, with painful perplexity, as he noticed the maid watching him closely. The note read as follows,—

“Ambrose, please come.

“ANNETTE.”

Ambrose folded the note and replaced it in its envelope, apparently in deep thought and embarrassment. He quickly understood both its meaning and its brevity. He understood the degree of unhappiness that had inspired it. He felt that in her sense of pride and shame, she could not trust herself to talk thus to him by telephone. That her

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love at least to the extent of two words had overpowered every other feeling. That she could not resist saying less, and would not say more.

"Is there any answer to the note, sir?" said the maid, as she arose from her chair.

"Why, no," said Ambrose slowly. "Not now, but stay a moment," and the maid resumed her chair. "Yes, I will answer it." And as the spectre of his helpless wife, with her pathetic, loving eyes came before him, he wrote as follows,—

"Annette, I cannot come now. Wait.

"AMBROSE."

With feverish haste he sealed the note and handed it to the maid, who took her departure. Then with a silent prayer for the impulse that had guided his action, he clinched his hands until the finger nails almost cut the flesh as he listened to the footsteps of the maid going down the stairway and out to the street. He then started from his chair as to follow her and to take back the note, but again the vision of his wife came before his eyes, and after pressing to his lips the perfumed note, he fiercely tore it into minute fragments. Then, sinking back in his chair, his tense muscles relaxed, and a vague fear came into his heart, as in fevered imagination he saw Annette reading his abrupt message.

"I will telephone her that I will come," he said, as he tremblingly arose from his chair, and then,—

"Fie, this weakness is inexcusable. I must and will be a man. Here in this room where I look upon the memories of the happiest hour of my life, and which at the same time was the hour in which

my piece of mind was lost forever, here where I was weak, I shall be strong, though I could never say in her presence the words I have just written. Here I ——” and then with voice clear and decisive, he called out,—

“Adolph.”

“Yes, sir,” said Adolph, as he appeared at the door.

“Call up Hoffmeyer, and tell him to come here at two thirty to-day. Tell him to be promptly on time, as I must make a train for Northwood at four o’clock.”

Then, picking up a voluminous legal document, he unfolded it with such nervous haste that a distinctly audible crackling sound was produced, and holding it unfolded with both hands, he spoke again, but this time quietly.—“And, Adolph ——”

“Yes, sir.”

“You are, of course, aware that my relations with Mrs. Caldwell have been for some time of a friendly as well as businesslike nature.”

Adolph bowed in discreet silence.

“Also that they have been to some extent, confidential.”

Adolph again inclined his head silently.

“The incidents growing out of her suit for divorce are virtually closed, and in the future I would wish you to observe your usual caution, should any one refer to these matters.”

He then apparently became absorbed in the perusal of the paper he held, as Adolph quietly retired to his room.

A week passed, and no further message came from Annette. Her silence was to Ambrose far

worse than written or verbal complaint, and at length, tortured almost to the verge of distraction by his fears and the conflicting emotions of love and duty, he finally decided that neither his moral nor physical strength was equal to the strain he thus daily endured, and he determined that in a letter which he should write to Annette, he would end forever all questions of doubt and uncertainty, and force upon her, as well as himself, the moral status that their illicit love implied. He felt that in sending a letter such as he contemplated, he would precipitate a crisis. That he had morally reached the lowest rounds of the ladder of infamy, and that the next step meant oblivion, but he could endure no more; so in hopeless misery he sought a secluded spot, and as virtue and manhood in a last Titanic struggle died in his heart, he wrote as follows:—

“Annette, I must and will tell you all, or I shall go mad. I must describe to you, if I can, the struggle between my conscience and my love, for it is killing me. In the frightful misery I have endured, and which I feel has rendered me mentally irresponsible, I don't know which I deserve the most,—your pity or your curses. For more than a month I have done what was my plain and honest duty, as with no inspiring motive, save that of personal honor, I had done for ten years before meeting you; and I confess with what is perhaps my last sense of shame, that while I did the best I could, the gratitude, love and respect that my conduct inspired in others, has produced in my heart no feeling of peace, that heaven bestows as a reward for duty performed, though in my despair, I hopelessly prayed for this result, but instead, has filled my soul with

such misery and unrest, that in my love for you, a love that so rules my heart that it is my life itself, I feel my devotion as a husband has been misplaced. Call me a degenerate if you will, but let me be consistent; I love you, Annette, you alone; see! over my own signature with my own pen, I write these words. By this letter I shall give you absolute power over me, for you, who have less occasion to feel the stings of an outraged conscience, must do for me what I cannot do for myself. Can you be more cruel than I? Can you take this letter to my wife and read it to her? Can you tell her the full measure of my sin? Does not the bare contemplation of such an act enable you to realize in some degree the misery I endure? You cannot conceive of how, in my all absorbing love for you, I have struggled to break the chains of conscience that bind me to her. I have started a hundred times to come to you. In the dead hours of night, I have resolved that my first act of the following day should be to come to you, but as you are legally responsible only to yourself, you perhaps cannot understand how I feel. Can you explain for me a sentiment that holds me to my wife, when my every breath, my every heart-beat, my every sigh is one of passionate love for you? Are pity and respect so akin to love that they are in reality its Divine substance?

“Where is the point of departure at which we may draw a dividing line between earthly duty and earthly desire? And will I be happy in repudiating my marriage vows with no excuse that morality could sanction? An act that would ostracize me from society and perhaps from you? Should I stay

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with her? Should I finish a life of misery, and hope for the happiness of uncertain future life, for uncertain reward, or should I accept or hope for the certainty of earthly bliss with you? Could I, in your arms, forget when there is so much for me to remember? Will your loving words, your caresses, banish from my mind the helpless form whose loving heart leaps from her eyes when they rest on me? Shall I leave my wife now and forever, and come to you? Will you accept me if I come? Would you kiss or curse the traitor, who thus betrayed the helpless innocence and purity of God?

“Do not misinterpret the meaning of this letter, Annette. You must not, you shall not. In all this chaos of my soul, there is no question of my love for you. It is only that you have set a task for my conscience too severe, and death is preferable to its continuance.

“You have repeatedly insisted that I should not break the heart that loves and leans on me. By your persistent refusal to wreck the happiness of my wife, you have preserved her peace of mind, but you have added to my misery by forcing upon me a proper conception of my duty, and a more intense realization of my crime. You have sacrificed yourself on the altar of our illicit, hopeless love, and in doing so, gave up all that virtue and honor a good woman holds most dear; while I, in obedience to your desires and the promptings of my own conscience, have sought to endure the love of my long estranged wife, while my heart, chilled with darkness and gloom, in its fevered imagination, was ever seeking the sunshine of your smiles and the music of your voice.

“In my absence, existence to you is not so harsh, for with my departure no spectre of guilt, living or dead, arises to confront you. So imagine, if you can, the agony I endure, when on my return from you, I must accept the trusting love, the confidence and caresses of my wife, whose pathetic, mournful eyes overwhelm me with remorse, haunt me throughout my waking hours, and fill even my dreams with terror. Ah, no! Annette, Annette, all this must end. I cannot and will not continue this pretense of manhood. You must either go with me far away, or we must part. We cannot be lawfully happy, but let us hope we can forget. I will go with you to the end of the world. I will provide for her, so that she shall not want, but I cannot go on as in the past. I cannot caress her, thinking only of you, for my soul cries out against such monstrous hypocrisy. If I have never yet told you how much I love you, let me do so now. I can and will commit any crime for your sake, but I cannot live thus, standing in the lime-light of purity, and realize the stinging contrasts of innocence and guilt. We must face the issue as it stands. I am willing to be known as the worst of criminals, if you will love me. I shall do as you say, Annette. Your love for me has afforded me the only happy hours I have known since childhood, and in its all prevailing power it shall consign me to future joy or woe. In you, Annette, lies my destiny.

“I cannot end this letter and say it is finished. My heart, not my hand seems to guide the pen, and it fain and ever would write helplessly and hopelessly, only these words. I love you, Annette, I love you. Choose for me, Annette; say to me,

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come as you are, come to me forever. Say that you will take me as the wretch that I am. Show me how much you love me. Prove to me that in your heart your love for me is stronger than my sense of duty, and I, such as I am, will come to you. I, who in life or in death will ever be your lover.

“AMBROSE.”

CHAPTER XV

MRS. WEEDAHL ADVISES ANNETTE

NORTHWOOD, a pleasing little summer resort in the mountains, while a place of vital interest to the chief actors in this narrative, was a sparsely settled community, whose unpretentious hotels and time-worn, weather-beaten cottages, at varying distances from each other, constituted a place of abode for the summer, whose general features were quite familiar to Americans of moderate means. There was a general store, which also served as a post-office, and almost anything in the line of merchandise was obtainable there, from candy to salt pork, and from golf sticks to plows. Beyond this central industry, the only apparent business of the place seemed to be the work of caring for summer boarders. In looking over the unkempt, poorly-clothed, but hardy-looking natives, the first impression of the visitor would naturally be one of curiosity, to know how they kept from starving during the long, cold winters. But while we have no hesitation in saying that this anxiety for the mountaineer would be a matter of concern to the visitor on his arrival, should he stay for the entire summer season, it would not be a source of worryment to him when he departed.

The scenery in the vicinity of Northwood was quite wild and picturesque. The railroad, in approaching it, wound around and through a seemingly

endless cluster of densely-wooded hills, which in their far-removed, isolated altitudes, seemed no part of an integral system, but a vast and most intricate maze of nature; so that when the traveler arrived at his destination, his senses of location were so confused, that the sun never seemed to be in the right place until he got home again.

The vale, or glen, as it was familiarly known to the residents and visitors at Northwood, was the principal scenic attraction. It was wild, rocky and deep, and a large mountain stream rushed and tumbled over the rocks and boulders, as with headlong precipitancy it sought a smoother bed in the open country beyond. The principal points of interest in the glen were rendered accessible by well-kept paths, which led through a forest of tall trees; other paths diverging from these, led to pleasing and more secluded nooks, where rustic benches and spreading areas of luxuriant ferns invited the world-weary mortal to revel in solitude and calm repose.

It was in one of these obscure localities, close by the brink of the ravine, and to which through the branches of the trees was wafted the fragrance of new-mown hay from an adjoining field that Ambrose had written his letter to Annette. Here, alone with nature and nature's God, his emotions had fought what was virtually a drawn battle with his conscience, and the only commendable result of the struggle was that truth and consistency had been strictly observed. He had not paused to consider the possible effect of his words, and after finishing the letter, he folded, addressed and sealed it in what seemed to be a condition of mad delirium. A vague and undefinable purpose seemed to pos-

sess his mind, for which he felt morally irresponsible, and which was almost akin to that of the maniac, whose conduct, when bereft of his reason, is indicative only of the pitiable cause that made him insane. He felt that in writing this letter, he had in his agony of mind obeyed both the promptings of his heart and conscience. That he had, with consistent truth and sincerity, revealed all, and had not evaded in any way the responsibilities of his honor or his love. He seemed fearful that his resolve to send the letter would fail. Then as he noted the increasing shadows about him, he hastily consulted his watch and found that it was near sunset. Brushing aside the branches of the trees, he climbed over the fence, and following a road that divided the fields, he made a short cut to the village. He entered the post-office, stamped his letter, and then with the same feeling of doubt and uncertainty, dropped it into the letter-box. Then, standing for a moment irresolute, his arms seeming to hang helpless at his side, he walked quickly from the post-office to his hotel. As he hastened along, he met a group of ladies and gentlemen, guests of the hotel at which he was located, and who stopped as they saw him rapidly approaching. Ambrose, as he paused in front of them, raised his hat with a kindly smile and a polite "good-evening."

"Why, judge, where have you been?" said one of the ladies. "We were about to organize a searching-party to look for you. You will lose your dinner, if you don't hurry, and your wife on the porch is waiting for you anxiously."

"I am very sorry that my absence has caused anxiety," said Ambrose, quietly. "I was loafing in

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the woods some distance from here, and did not realize that it was growing so late."

"We comforted your wife the best we could," continued the lady. "We told her that even a model husband would sometimes be late for dinner."

"Thank you," said Ambrose, smilingly. "For of course in speaking of model husbands you must mean me. But really I have known of model husbands who did worse than that," and bowing again, he hastened on.

He found his wife awaiting him on the hotel porch, and she smiled happily, and came forward to meet him, as he hastened up the steps. Thin, white gloves concealed her unsightly hands, and a light veil hid from view to some extent the deep red scars that disfigured her face. The mountain air had wrought a great change in her condition, and her general health and strength were now nearly restored. Her disfigured face and hands were a constant source of grief to her, and any perceptible curiosity of strangers caused her the keenest humiliation. She maintained, at all times, an attitude of reserve toward the guests of the hotel, and while she accepted, with grateful cordiality, the companionship of other ladies, she made no attempts to force herself upon them. With a deeper sense of pain she felt that even her husband, in the marked attention he showed her, found inspiration for his conduct in a sense of pity, that his constant devotion was a task. That he too, in a paraphrase of Young's familiar words, "Would his ready visit pay where beauty smiled," and then realizing that in the past she had actually fought to win his love; that her virtue and her complaints alike had failed; that

even her ordinary attractiveness was now gone forever, and that of his former uninteresting wife only an object of pity now remained, she still consoled herself with the thought that one heart loved her; and with the pleading pathos of an affection that sought to comfort him; to devise some innocent compensation for his devotion, and which ever indicated the fear in her heart that her husband would grow weary of her, she appealed as of old to his imagination by frequently saying,

“But, Ambrose, dear, you still have my picture, and you can tell your friends that I wasn’t always so ugly as I am now.”

But Ambrose, with despairing indifference, with alternate hope and fear, thinks only of the results his letter to Annette will produce, and as he sits with his wife in an obscure corner of the porch, her elbow resting on the arm of his chair, the mechanical regularity of his hand in caressing hers at length becomes a source of amusement to her, and she says laughingly,

“What a machine lover you are, Ambrose. Thank you, that will do.”

On the morning following the day it was written, Annette received the letter. She read it hastily. A word was a sentence. Then she reread it, again and again. For an hour or more she sat alone, immovable. The pallor of her face and the vacant stare of her eyes seemed to indicate that a dark abyss had yawned before her, and beyond which the star of hope faded forever from her view. Thus, dumb with grief, she sat cold and motionless, while two sentences of the letter rang in her ears. “Do for me what I cannot do for myself.

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Show me how much you love me." Then, as nature asserted itself, in the weakness of her love, she burst into tears, through which she dimly gazed at the letter she still held in her hand, as she said,

"You have asked too much of me, Ambrose. Oh, God, it is too much, too much."

And then after the violence of her grief had spent itself, her sense of reason, in some degree, returned to her, and she continued,—

"Ah, Ambrose, dear, you expect me to decide this question? A question which means life or death to me, and perhaps to you? Your honor holds your love in bondage, and you beg of my love to tempt you further,—to the commission of a greater crime. You, a judge, whose senses of justice are ever sublime, so conquered by the power of your love for me, that you ask, you beg of my woman's heart a decision that would not only dishonor us eternally, but would murder the virtuous wife that loves you. Your last hope for happiness lies in the thought that I, in my selfish love, will be unfair; that I can be more cruel than you, and stab to the heart the love and happiness of your helpless wife. Then, in my weakness and guilty shame, I should say to you, 'Come.' But, ah! Ambrose, how can I say no, when to say it means misery, woe and death to me, and to bid you come, means life, joy and heaven."

And then, as the realization of their love overwhelmed her, she went on, "Ah, how we love each other. How I adore him. I will not weep and wail. I will not mourn and pray. It is rot. I will, yes," and a smile of hope illumined her face and shone through her tears. "I will write Ambrose a

brief note, and then I will go to Mrs. Weedahl. I will tell her everything, and she shall advise me what to do."

Then seizing a pen and blotting the sheet of paper both with tears and ink, in eager haste, she wrote, as follows,—

"Ambrose, dear Ambrose, wait for me. I cannot decide now. I cannot answer your letter, for I am not equal to the task. I will answer it in person. I love you more than ever, since I have read your letter. I cannot write now, but I will tell you, and show you how much I love you. Do not come to me now. I will come to you soon; soon, Ambrose, dear.

"ANNETTE."

Then in mild hysteria, as she wept and laughed alternately, she threw off her morning robe, and standing before a mirror, she loosened the disarranged coils of her hair, which fell in silken masses upon her white and perfectly formed shoulders and bust, the beauty of which she herself was forced to note, as she hastily prepared for a visit to Berylwood.

"Oh, yes," she said, as she thus noted in the mirror the graceful outlines of her beautiful face and form, "I am pretty; Ambrose said so. He said I was beautiful, charming, lovely and everything else he could think of, and when the long list of adjectives at his command was exhausted, he crushed me in his arms, and then looked and sighed all the rest. Poor fellow,—and you love me so, but ah! Ambrose, when this beauty fades, will you—— But

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nonsense, when I fade you will be withered. Now, these red eyes, a little witch-hazel and powder. Mrs. Weedahl laughs at tears, and Ambrose won't want to carry off a wailing woman as his stolen bride, who goes without the formality of license or ceremony, if he is thus forced to remember that he left another one wailing at home."

The reader of this narrative will thus observe that Annette was anticipating the advice that Mrs. Weedahl would give. That instead of assuming the moral responsibility that her lover asked of her, she would transfer it to a woman, whom she felt would point the way to happiness in their illicit love. She believed that while Mrs. Weedahl was unscrupulous and dishonorable in many ways, she was worldly wise and free from all sentiment to such an extent that she would thoroughly endorse her proposed flight with Ambrose, and in fact advise her that it was the best thing to do. She felt that Mrs. Weedahl had more than ordinary common sense, and that she was vastly her superior in age and wisdom. She knew, that while even Ambrose himself felt only contempt for her business honor, he had respect for her business ability and sympathy for her emotional nature, and so Annette, yielding to a love that overshadowed every sense of moral responsibility, felt that the advice she expected would justify her in going to Ambrose, and telling him that she would go with him. That in her opinion, the happiness of two souls was of more importance than the happiness of one, and finally that she had seen and consulted Mrs. Weedahl, who in her ripe experience and wisdom, had sanctioned in every way her proposed action.

This was all very well, only Annette had not quite made a correct hypothesis as to Mrs. Weedahl, but she thought she had, and felt so sure of it; so sure that her moral responsibility was ended; that as the train carried her to Raleigh, she softly hummed the air of a popular song with the gayety and abandon of a courtesan, who, singing boldly, as she stoops to dishonor, so wounds a man's senses of propriety, that his feelings of admiration for her are often turned to those of pity.

On arriving at Raleigh, Annette took a conveyance, and in a few minutes arrived at Berylwood. She had not advised Mrs. Weedahl of her intended visit, and so, after being duly announced and conducted to the privacy of her bedroom, she was not surprised to find the good lady scantily attired and keeping cool with a bottle of iced champagne which stood upon a table near at hand, and of which she had already freely partaken.

"My goodness, Annette. This is an awfully pleasing surprise. Come and kiss me. 'Scuse me for not getting up. You see I'm perfectly happy. That's right," she said, as Annette kissed her plethoric red cheek. "When women kiss each other the affection in evidence amounts to the same as when men shake hands. It don't mean any more, but it's supposed to be the proper thing," and the intoxicated Jewess leered upon her visitor rather grotesquely, as she thus indelicately essayed to appear sober.

Annette felt some sense of dismay as she realized the condition of her hostess, and as she gazed upon her with mingled feelings of impatience and shame, she vividly remembered a remark that Am-

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brose had once made that the effect of champagne upon a pure-minded and virtuous woman was to render her a hundredfold more charming, but that its effect upon an immoral, immodest woman was to render her disgusting. So somewhat abashed, she greeted Mrs. Weedahl with quiet diffidence, and for the moment made no attempt to converse with her.

"Sit down, Annette, right here by me on this sofa. Take off your hat while I fix you a drink," and the good lady succeeded in filling a glass with champagne, which she gave her visitor, and then she went on,—

"People who don't object to a little wine and wickedness, enjoy life so much more than those who do, and they learn so much more, even if they do pay dearly for it."

In noting these words of Mrs. Weedahl, a little timely comment is perhaps here permissible. The fact that the habitual use of stimulants degrades mankind is none the less true than the statement that they promote the development of wisdom. If the first effect of wine is to make us wise, it is no joke when we say that its second effect is to make us otherwise, and this play upon the words will give but added emphasis. "In wine there is truth," but this means the cost of more than one bottle, both in money and in tears. The author does not expect a total abstainer to appreciate these words, and in the interests of true morality, he prefers without saying more to tax the intelligence of others who may question their truth.

On this occasion, Mrs. Weedahl, as the reader now understands her, was, as an habitual user of intoxicants, sufficiently intoxicated to be both honest

and wise, and the unfortunate Annette soon and sadly realized it.

"Well, Mrs. Weedahl," said Annette, "I don't object to a little wine or a little wickedness either, but it seems that even in living up to such liberal ideas I cannot have anything that I want."

"Nonsense, Annette," said the Jewess. "People who don't get what they want in this world can always console themselves with the thought that they got what they ought to have. More trouble with your love affair?"

"Oh, yes, a whole lot of trouble."

"I supposed so."

"And I want you to tell me what to do."

"Very well, I'll do my best. Drunken people, you know, sometimes think of things that sober people forget."

Annette then related in detail all that had happened and concealed nothing. She even went so far as to intimate the nature of the advice that she desired Mrs. Weedahl to give. And as she did so, she noted a rather scornful curl of the lip by the Jewess, who listened, however, with intense interest, and without interruption or comment until Annette had finished.

"Well! well!" said Mrs. Weedahl. "What a pair of conscience-stricken fools you are, and I don't know which is the worst. Some people wouldn't be satisfied if they could have August in January, and other people are so easily satisfied, that in buying a watch they are content if it only goes when they do. Why can't you go on as you have in the past, when no one is the wiser. I have never believed that Moses and Webster would agree

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as to the true meaning of the Seventh Commandment. But no, you are not satisfied. You are like some abnormal people, who live in hotels and who getting everything they pay for, and ought to have, demand more, more, more, until they sicken of everything. Like people who buy automobiles, and who must go faster, faster, faster, until they break their necks. Some wise man once said,— ‘Be good, and you’ll be lonely.’ Cupid has no conscience and does not wear pants, and as for sincerity, I sometimes feel that the only kind we can believe in is the voice of the dying man who cries, ‘God save me.’ The whole world is a world of sin and deception, and down in its heart it does not choose to be otherwise. But of course, with an honest deference to morality, it would rather sin in secret. True respectability is a very superficial element of its real character. So much virtue is assumed in obedience to social and business requirements, that we may well pause before we tear away the outer garb of chastity, and reveal what is beneath. Why should we tear it aside? When a thing is so badly soiled that it cannot be cleaned, the best thing to do is to paint it black, and give it a coat of varnish. We know then that it is black, and accept it consistently for what it is worth. The trouble with Ambrose is, that when he is with you he forgets; when he is with his wife, he remembers. But she knows nothing and is not over-curious. ‘If ignorance is bliss, etc.,’ the happiest wives are those who are discreet enough to repress a curiosity that prompts them to question a husband’s constancy.

“You say you cannot live without him; that you will commit suicide. Nonsense. You look

ever so much prettier sitting there on that sofa drinking champagne than what you would in a black box with your eyes shut, and if you want to know how much the world will miss you when you are gone, just stick a pin in a mill-pond, pull it out and look for the hole. Or, you can call this love affair off. It is time to do so. I am surprised at the prolonged and increasing love that you and Ambrose feel for each other. You have been on terms of close intimacy for several months. It is not usually so. A friend of mine, a woman I have known many years, keeps an up-town hotel for transient guests. In her parlor hangs a picture. It represents the old fable of a dog crossing over the foot-bridge of a stream, with a piece of meat in his mouth. He sees himself mirrored in the water, and imagining the other dog has a better piece of meat he grabs for it, and loses his own. My friend said that the guests who patronized her hotel, especially the men, reminded her so much of this dog. 'Fire and water are good servants but bad masters,' and women and wine, two of God's greatest blessings, are styled as curses by such men as these, but by such men only. You should forget Ambrose. Marry some respectable fellow and settle down. There are hundreds of good men who would jump at the chance of getting you. But no, Ambrose cannot endure a good wife, and you must have what belongs to another woman, and there is no more use of my telling you to forget Ambrose, as you ought to do, than there would be in telling a decent girl that a certain handsome young fellow, whom she admired, was bad. Do you want me to advise Ambrose to leave his wife,

and run off with you? No, no, a thousand times no. There is a limit to everything, even to my wickedness, and bad as I am, I would scorn him for the rest of his life if he did such a thing. He is a good man ; you a good woman, but you are both so blinded by love that you don't know right from wrong. Your inclination for each other has become a sense of highest duty. Awake from your dream. Suffer out your torment, both of you, as best you can. Accept your fate as it is thus given you by destiny. Plot as you will against the happiness of that crippled, but true and loving wife, and you will perhaps live long enough to realize, as I do, that as the mental power to do evil increases, the physical desire declines and is lost in the grave, while the power of virtue like hers, lives beyond the grave to enlighten and bless the world."

Mrs. Weedahl, as she uttered these words, appeared quite sober, and Annette, with white face and tear-dimmed eyes, arose to leave.

"Stay with me, and have dinner, Annette," said the Jewess, kindly. "We will drink wine, and I will help you to forget."

"I thank you," said Annette, "but I cannot stay. I intended to go out to Northwood from here, this evening, but I shall return home now. The conveyance that brought me from the station is still waiting for me ;" and then, as she bade the Jewess a sad good-bye and fully realized the crushing death-blow to her hopes, a deep, intense feeling of shame came into her heart, as she felt that her mad love had made of her a worse sinner than the immoral woman whom she had hoped would aid her in crime.

Annette still remained standing before the Jewess, whose cold, cutting words seemed to have chilled her to the heart, but as hope died within her, she seemed clinging to a last straw, as she said,—

“Do you think she loves Ambrose very much?”

A genuine expression of curiosity appeared on the face of the Jewess, as Annette made this query, and then the hard lines of her face softened.

“You poor unhappy woman,” she said. “I do indeed pity you from the bottom of my heart. Your love is not a fleeting fancy. It is the one all-absorbing passion of your life, and what must be its strength and power when it so masters a good woman like you, that it would drive you to the commission of a dastardly crime. May God pity you, Annette, and Ambrose and his wife as well. Yes, she loves him. She lives only for him. She told the nurse recently that she would rather have died, knowing he loved her, than to live and realize that he did not, and more than this, Annette, for I must turn the knife in your wound. The nurse told me that she never saw such devotion as Ambrose showed for his wife during her illness. I really think that Ambrose loves her, but in the blindness of his passion for you he cannot realize it. Love has never been properly defined. In the human heart it is virtually a fight for supremacy between God and the devil, and earthly peace depends upon the result of the struggle. All the rights in this case, legal and moral, are hers, and you must bow to your fate.”

“Good-bye, Mrs. Weedahl,” said Annette, extending her hand. “I thank you for this advice. You have pointed the way. There is but one

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course open to me," and her gaze lingered mournfully on the stately mansion and trees of Berylwood, as the time-worn conveyance carried her from the park and rattled over the road leading to the station.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VALE OF NORTHWOOD

THE events immediately following Annette's visit to Mrs. Weedahl, are best told in a letter which Ambrose received from Adolph two days after the interview we have just described. The letter, briefly suggestive of alarm in the mind of the clerk, read as follows,—

“ Judge Pierce,

“ MY DEAR SIR :—

“ To-day on returning to the office from my luncheon, I met Mrs. Caldwell at the foot of the stairs. She was coming out as I went in. Though she wore a veil I could not help noticing that she seemed in great agitation and distress. I asked her if she had called to see you. She said, ‘ Yes,’ but as you were not in she would see you some other time. I inquired if she would leave any message. She said no, it was nothing important. Her manner and tone indicated a condition of nervous hysteria, and as she went out, I went up-stairs where the old notary Stubbs met me, and he seemed quite alarmed. ‘ Did you meet Mrs. Caldwell, just now ?’ said he. I said yes. ‘ Well,’ said he, ‘ she just left my office, where she has been for nearly an hour, and she acted very much like a crazy woman. She had two papers, written instruments of some kind,

which she insisted upon having acknowledged without my reading same. I objected, but finally, at her urgent request, I fixed up the papers with our signatures, seal, etc. She has got some sad trouble on hand,' said the old man.

"I questioned the old notary at length, but could learn nothing more, and thought best to promptly advise you of the incident.

"Sincerely yours,
"ADOLPH."

Ambrose had received this letter at the post-office, whither he had gone for his mail as usual, about five o'clock in the afternoon. He opened and read it there, and all the suspense and dire forebodings and torture of uncertainty he had felt since sending his letter to Annette, culminated at that moment in a mad passion and frenzy that swept away every other consideration, except a desire to see her; to plead for her forgiveness; to accept any terms she might name, to be the slave of her every caprice, if only she would forgive and love him as of old.

"Why didn't Adolph follow her to the Richelieu and tell her," he muttered angrily in an effort to blame somebody. "But what could he say? Why didn't I go to her, instead of sending that letter? Ah! Annette, God knows I could never have told you verbally what I said in the letter. I had to be far from you to say what I did. Could I have looked into your eyes and suggested the bare possibilities of such a thing as parting from you? No, no, I'll go to the Richelieu now, at once. But there is no train until eight this evening. Oh,

misery! I'll wire her," and he quickly left the post-office for the railroad station, where seizing telegraph blanks and pen he hastily scrawled the following message:

"Will be at the Richelieu late this evening.

"AMBROSE."

"What is this word?" said the operator, as he read over the message, "Will be at the Rickity."

"Richelieu," said Ambrose, as he spelled the word aloud, and looked at the operator, as one awakening from a trance, and as he walked away, he muttered, "Good Lord, he can't read the word heaven, when a lawyer writes it," and he smiled grimly at this morbid effort to joke with himself.

He then walked rapidly to his hotel, planning the excuse he should make for going to the city that evening, and as he neared the hotel, he noted the figure of a woman seated on the otherwise deserted porch. As he reached the steps, the recognition between the woman and himself was mutual, and she arose from her chair, as Ambrose with two bounds up the steps reached the porch. The woman was Annette's maid.

"Tell, me," said Ambrose as he seized her arm, and almost dragged her around to an obscure corner of the porch, "where is Annette? Is she well? Is she here? Where is she? Is she with you? Why don't you answer me?" he said, as he gripped her arm until her face showed an expression of pain.

"She is well," said the maid, "but very unhappy," and she drew from the bosom of her dress

a note which she gave Ambrose, who without looking at it, continued to question her fiercely.

"Where is she now, is she with you? Is she here?"

"She is here in Northwood," said the maid, "but not at this hotel. We are stopping over at the Mountain House."

"I shall go there right away," said Ambrose. "Come, we will go over there together," and again taking her by the arm, he started forward.

"But you are forgetting your letter, sir," said the maid, pointing to the note he held in his hand.

"True," said Ambrose, "I forgot," and he tore open the dainty missive and eagerly read, as follows,—

"Ambrose, we arrived this afternoon, and are stopping at the Mountain House. How and when can I see you?"

"ANNETTE."

The knowledge that she was safe; that she was at Northwood and located at a comfortable hotel; that she had come to him as promised; that he could see her in an hour or so, greatly relieved the overwrought feelings of Ambrose, and so allayed his anxiety that to the maid, who knew of what had transpired, he said in joyous exultation, "Tell her that I love her more than ever; that I am so happy to know she is here; that I got a letter from Adolph, which greatly alarmed me. Just tell her how much I love her; that I am so glad she is here," said Ambrose, whose senses and words were

strangely muddled and incoherent, in the joyous reaction he now felt.

"Hadn't you better write all this?" said the maid, as she smiled with good-natured significance. "I don't think I can remember so much."

"True, yes, I will write," said Ambrose. "Wait here for me a moment," and he went to the writing room and wrote as follows,—

"Annette, dearest Annette, you can never know the terrible anxiety and suspense I have endured the past few days, nor will you ever realize how happy you have made me by coming here to-day. Meet me this evening at eight o'clock at the entrance to the glen. You will find me waiting there.

"Your lover,
"AMBROSE."

After the maid had gone, Ambrose remained seated on the porch alone, as the other guests of the hotel were either asleep or dressing for dinner. He felt that he needed this opportunity for reflection, and a cold realization of what her coming meant to him,—for he could only assume that it meant flight and consequent disgrace,—restored him in some degree to his senses.

"She has taken me at my word, and decided for me," and he smiled grimly and uneasily, as with a restlessness he could not control, he arose from his chair, and with bowed head, paced to and fro on the porch. "She will be all mine evermore, but there are other things not so delightful that I must also consider. She has doubtless considered everything,

and her visit to the old notary was for the purpose of making some financial provision for her faithful maid, whom she perhaps does not wish to take with her. Fool that I am. I should have known and understood this at once. I said a few days ago that we would begin life anew, but I have not made a blessed plan as to where and how I will begin. I should have anticipated this when I virtually forced her to run off with me. Dakota? Practice in divorce courts? Yes. Other clients similar to Annette? No. Andrew Pearson, Attorney at Law? Yes, that will do as well as any other name, for it sounds like my own. How will Annette like it? She won't worry about names. Poor soul, she said some time ago that she knew what she was, but not just who she was. I'll tell her she cannot be Mrs. Pierce, but that I will try hard to make her think she is; and the awakening? Rubbish—nonsense—rot—I must not pause to think. I dare not."

And Ambrose, affecting an exhilaration which he felt needed some sort of a stimulating influence, kicked over a porch chair and whistled merrily, as he went into the office and surprised the clerk, whom he proceeded to entertain with a fusillade of laughable stories, jokes and witty sayings, after which he went to his room and avoiding conversation with his wife, he dressed and went down to dinner.

"I am going for a walk to the glen, and shall go from there to the Glen House to spend the evening with some gentlemen friends, who are stopping there. We shall perhaps have a game or so, and it may be late when I get home," said Ambrose to his

wife, who in company with other ladies was seated on the porch. He then lit a cigar and smiling pleasantly he went down the steps and walked slowly away.

When out of sight of the hotel, he threw away his cigar, and walking rapidly, soon reached the appointed place. He consulted his watch and found he was nearly half an hour ahead of time. He was incapable of remaining in one spot, so he paced nervously up and down the road. The twilight deepened, and again, for the twentieth time, he looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock, and through the gloom, he saw the form of a woman approaching. No second glance was needed for him to recognize her. She wore no hat, but the dainty poise of her head; the graceful undulating movement, as she came toward him were instantly noted by the impatient lover, as he hastened to meet her.

"Annette!"

"Ambrose!"

Annette had never appeared more charming than on this occasion. The weather was warm, and she was attired in a summer evening costume, the simplicity of which, in its artistic conception, emphasized, if possible, the beauty that it thinly veiled. They were standing together with clasped hands, so close that each could feel the tumultuous beating of the other's heart, Annette with bowed head and downcast eyes. As Ambrose looked up and down the road to note if they were observed, the full moon, yet low in the horizon, was beginning to shed its flood of silvery light upon the dense green shade of the forest of tall trees before them. As Ambrose

listened he heard voices, and saw in the distance a group of people coming toward the glen.

"Come," said he, "I know a place where they will not disturb us," and firmly grasping her hand, he led her through the woods to the obscure retreat where he had written the letter, and where by the mournful destiny that had ever shadowed his life, the questions he had asked Annette were now to be answered.

"Is that the glen and the stream down there?" she said, as with one knee on the commodious bench and her arm on the railing, she withdrew her other hand from his grasp and endeavored to peer through the gloom to the depths below. Then, as she heard the sound of rushing waters, she turned her head, and the moonlight through an opening in the foliage shone upon her face in which abject terror was noted by her lover, and she clung to him fearful and trembling.

"Oh! Ambrose, this is the place of my awful dream. This forest of trees, the dark ravine, the sound of rushing waters, the moonlight, oh! it is the place. I see it all. I see it all. I parted from you here. Ambrose, love, I lost you here."

"No, no, Annette. It was only a dream," said Ambrose, as seated on the bench, he clasped her in his arms. "See, you are in my arms, and you shall never part from me again. My honor, my heart, my soul are yours. I was wild, crazy, mad when I wrote you that letter. Forgive me, dear. I resented the delicacy you showed in teaching me a lesson the day that you called on me. It nearly broke my heart when I deliberately prolonged my own agony and yours by refusing to come when you sent your maid

to my office. But you are in my arms at last, at last, Annette, and no earthly power shall ever part us again. So laugh at your dream, and for my sake, never remember it again."

And as he said these words, he crushed in his arms her feebly resisting form with the ease and strength of a giant, until through panting and gasping she remained passive in his embrace.

"Ah! Ambrose, dear, you cause me to forget. I did not intend in coming here to-night——"

"But you must forget. You shall not remember that dream. You shall not talk at all. If that subject is to be mentioned again, I will stop it just as I did now," for Ambrose had checked the utterance that came from her lips with repeated kisses, little realizing what she might have said, if he had allowed her to continue.

Annette sighed submissively, as she answered, "Very well, dear, I will not speak of it again."

For hours they thus remained, so absorbed in the joy of their meeting, that neither had the courage or inclination to think or talk of anything else. Each seemed to be subject to the influence of an unnatural mood, and while Ambrose avoided, in seeming dread, a discussion of their anticipated flight, he vainly sought to cheer and quiet Annette, who at frequent intervals seemed in a condition of nervous hysteria. She wept and laughed in turn, and Ambrose could neither understand the cause of her tears, nor could he see a reasonable excuse for her levity. She pleaded with tears for his caresses; then laughed joyously, and when, with endearing words, he sought to console her as in his arms she wept piteously, her grief would again sud-

denly turn to laughter, and so when at length he heard in the distance the village clock strike the hour of twelve, he became convinced that she badly needed quiet and rest, and so quickly deciding not to disturb her mind with any matters, the discussion of which would distress her, and to postpone them until the next day, he said,—

“Annette, dear, come. I think I had better take you to your hotel. You are not well. This worry and anxiety you have endured, and our meeting to-night has produced such a reaction on your nerves that you are not yourself. Come, let us go,” and taking her hand, as she sat with her arm on the railing of the bench, and her face concealed as it rested on her arm, he gently urged her to accompany him.

“Come, dear, let us meet here again to-morrow afternoon at three o’clock,” he said.

At these words, Annette raised her head, and as she looked upon her lover, as he bent over her, the moonlight through the foliage threw its flickering effects of light and shade upon her face, from which Ambrose instinctively recoiled in horror.

“Sit down here beside me, Ambrose,” she said. “See, I am composed. Am I not? I will talk to you. I will be sensible.”

Then as Ambrose sat beside her, his arm encircling her waist, she went on,—

“Ambrose, dear, you asked me to decide for you; to fly with you, and God forgive me, I had decided to go. The struggle in my own heart was soon ended. It was so sweet to think of being your own; to call you mine. My selfish love caused me to forget everything. I covered every page of your

letter with kisses and tears. Then I got myself ready to come to you. Mad with my own love, and with the joyous realization that you loved me so that you would give up everything for me, I started to come to you ; to be nothing myself ; to be everything, anything for you. Ambrose, I stopped at Berylwood. I desired an endorsement to the responsibility that you placed upon my love. I wished that some one older and wiser than I, should advise me, and I felt that Mrs. Weedahl, old and immoral, but wise, would, in sympathy for my eager wicked love, advise me as I wished to be advised. But, dear Ambrose, the woman for whose morality you have the most supreme contempt, the woman whom you consider conscienceless in the matter of virtue, the worst of all that is bad, condemned our proposed flight as most disgraceful and criminal. She said she would scorn you for the rest of her life, if we did such a thing. She said you loved your wife, and did not realize it ; that the nurse had told her she had never seen such devotion for a wife as yours. Now, Ambrose, Mrs. Weedahl is right, and if you should leave your wife, grief would kill her ; remorse would kill you, and then I should follow you both ; thus three lives would be sacrificed where one will do. For Ambrose, dearest, I am in the way. I am an unhappy obstacle to the honor and peace of both you and your wife. It is your duty to live, and it is mine to die."

"No, no, Annette, how foolish you talk. You shall not die. No, I will come back to you. I will be anything you wish ; your dog, your slave. How can you speak of death when I love you more than all in heaven or on earth. You are ill to-night.

Your mind is disturbed, distracted by grief. Do you mean that we should part? Has the crime I proposed made me an object of disgust to you? Am I by the advice of Mrs. Weedahl too vile for you?"

"Ambrose, I would accept you if I dared, with open arms forever, though you were the vilest criminal on earth. No sin you could commit would change my love for you, but a greater sacrifice is required of me; a greater duty lies before me. You think me ill, hysterical, crazy, perhaps," and again Ambrose noted the unnatural drawn expression on her face, and a hunted look of fear in her eyes.

"Well, Ambrose, let me see, I came here sane. I went to the notary. Adolph saw me. Yes, that is right. Then I came to you. How pretty I looked, and am I pretty now? This face, this form, please you. I have been your mistress, I am your bride to-night. Now love me, Ambrose, love me, again, again," and she fell in his arms, as in pity and the silent anguish of despair, he clasped her to his breast.

Thus again in prolonged silence, did they continue their tryst. The moon was high in the heavens above; a squirrel nibbling in the tall trees caused a pine cone to fall at their feet. A night bird warbled a brief and plaintive ditty, evidently calling for his mate. On the far side of the ravine, a heavy wagon rumbled over the rocky road bearing a belated but merry party of young folks, evidently a straw ride party from one of the hotels. They were singing and shouting loudly. Ambrose could hear the wagon swaying from side to side,

groaning beneath its heavy load. It was an old wagon, well worn, for the hubs did not fit the axles closely, and made an audible knocking sound, as the wheels sagged in and out. The laughter and singing continued, for the horses were walking, but at length a louder rumbling told of increased speed. They were going down hill ; the horses were trotting, and at last they went down to a valley ; the rumbling ceased, and the sound of voices died away.

Annette again was speaking.

"I am a divorced woman, Ambrose. The world has placed its seal of condemnation upon me. Why should I live? In all my life I have known the meaning of love for three short months. This is perhaps all I should have. With you I have fulfilled my destiny. I have justified the reputation that society forced upon me, and who in mockery and derision cheered me on to my fate. They insisted that I was a thing of evil ; that a divorced woman could be nothing else. They did not want me to be respectable. In being respectable, I should have disappointed them. They frowned upon me for trying to be honest. They insisted that my attempt to be virtuous was a pretense, and my only crime is that I have loved you, a love that in truth and fidelity was heaven-inspired, and God knows I could not help it."

Annette had released herself from the embrace of Ambrose, who with his hand over his eyes, in despair was leaning on the arm of the rustic seat. He heard Annette weeping, but did not note that she was kneeling on the grass until he heard her murmuring incoherently the words of a prayer. This

roused him to his senses, and as he turned, her one hand grasped his knee, while as the other fell on the wooden bench, he heard the crash of broken glass, and Annette with uplifted hands turned her face toward him imploringly, but no sound came from her lips.

"Annette, great God, what have you done? Your hand is bleeding," and taking his handkerchief, he essayed to stop the flow of blood. "What was that broken glass?" and then noting her distorted face, a worse horror changed his own, as picking up a portion of the glass phial she had broken, he realized that she had taken the contents to end her life.

Annette was still kneeling; still reaching out her arms to him, and Ambrose, dumb with grief and horror, fell on his knees beside her. As he did so, she placed in his hand a crumpled paper.

"Read it," she said.

Ambrose sprang up and in the moonlight read aloud,

"I alone am responsible for this. I have taken my own life."

The paper was duly signed and sealed, "Elias Stubbs, Notary."

"Ah! Annette! it was for this that you visited the notary," and again he knelt before her. "You shall not die. I will carry you to the hotel. I will save you. You must live. For me, Annette; for my sake."

But Annette, already sinking into a stupor, fell backward into her lover's arms, and murmured softly—"It is so dark. This numbness that bears me down. I cannot see you, dear. Take me once

more. For your sake—for hers,—for God,—He will forgive me,—and you,—love,—kiss me—— I have shown,—shown,—how much I love you. Your letter—my maid—she has everything. My wedding ring—give it to the sheriff—— I forgive—— May God forgive.”

Thus clasped in her lover's arms, the soul of the unhappy Annette was wafted on spirit wings to the judgment seat of that God, whose inexorable laws and justice she had sacrificed her life to fulfil, and as Ambrose remained holding in his arms the dead body of this woman, mournfully pleading for her sightless eyes to look upon him; for her lips yet warm to speak to him, the mists of the night rose from the vale below, and enveloping them in a kindly pall, the tears of nature thus mingled with those that stood upon the faces of the quick and the dead.

CHAPTER XVII

CONCLUSION

SEVERAL years have passed away, and Time, the only balm which can assuage or heal the grievous wounds to love that grim, defiant death hurls at those who dispute his merciless demands, had bestowed its kind and mellowing influence upon the erring mortal who, as narrated in the foregoing pages, had in the weakness of his human heart yielded to the influence of his manhood's only love. He does not seek for comfort on earth. He does not pray for an inconsistent earthly peace, but hopes that beyond the stars an agreeable immortality awaits him. Should he hope for less? Should he ask from an Almighty Power forgiveness for an only and undivided love that God or Nature may but once implant and nurture in the soil of truth? Should he ask for pardon, if in accepting a theory born of the modern wisdom of mankind, he weds himself to misery and then, in obedience to the mandates of that same social influence he endures to the end?

In the little cemetery at Raleigh, but a short distance apart are two humble graves. In the early summer, roses bloom above them, and amid the branches of tall oak and pine-trees the only sounds that break the silence and repose are the carols of song-birds, or the mournful sighs of summer winds. The cemetery is kept in condition of semi-good order by a rugged old man, who officiates in the dual capacity of church sexton and grave-digger.

It is a fine day of early spring, and the sexton is at work in the cemetery. He is cutting down brush, trimming trees and rose-bushes, and the rasping of his saw is heard as he cuts away some good-sized dead limb, which, as it falls to the ground, he picks up and throws upon a pile of other brush to be set on fire and burned later on. His son, an overgrown boy, is helping him, and as the boy's attention is attracted to another part of the cemetery, he says,

"There's the old judge again, pop. What makes him come here so often, do you s'pose? Nobody else comes here winter and summer like him."

The old sexton looked in the direction his son indicated, and saw the now familiar form of the tall, aged-looking man, who had just placed some flowers upon a grave, and was bending over it in a mournful attitude. The aged-looking man was Ambrose. His hair was silvery-white. His shoulders were bowed; his face was seamed with deep lines of grief, and a fixed expression of melancholy and careless indifference ever rested there. A gentle kindness and native refinement of manner marked his conduct to those who appeared kindly-disposed toward him, but the attempts of the curious to penetrate the mask of reserve he ever wore, were fruitless. When such an attempt was made, he ingenuously diverted a subject thus inspired by curiosity, and his polite affability in leading them to talk of something else, entertained kindly-disposed people and discouraged those who were morbidly inquisitive.

"The judge never forgets his murdered sister," said the old man in response to his son's remark

and question. "But he isn't an old man, Archy. They say he ain't fifty yet. I'm at least fifteen years older than he is."

"Well," said Archy, "he looks as if he was about eighty. Last New Year's day he came out here when the snow was a foot deep, and brought flowers, and say, pop, what's he always puttin' flowers on the grave of the sheriff's wife for? See, he is standing there now. She wasn't any relation to him, was she?"

"Not that I know of, Archy," said the old man. "He can put flowers where he pleases. It's no difference to me. Don't pile too much brush on that heap. It'll make a hot fire, and would scorch all the leaves off that young maple-tree. Make another pile of brush over here."

And thus do the old man and his son live in the present, while the white-haired, aged-looking man gazes at the spot where his love lies buried, lives in the past.

We see the sheriff, a drunken loafer, who as a miserable hanger-on for political crumbs, with bleary eyes and bloated, unshaved face, still walks the streets of Raleigh, an object of disgust to those who know him, and as well as to those who do not.

We see Ambrose at home. We note the quiet, kindly dignity that characterizes him here as elsewhere. It is evening. He has finished his cigar and read his paper through. As he remains silent and seemingly absorbed in the contemplation of some far away object, his disfigured wife, with loving, questioning eyes, approaches him. He extends his arms, and she sits upon his knee. Then his arm encircles her waist, and her head rests upon his shoulders.

"You do love me, dear, don't you?" she says.

"Why certainly," said her husband.

"And you have always been true to me?"

"Yes, dear," said Ambrose, looking upward.

"And you always will be true, won't you?"

"Always," said her husband in a distinct tone, whose firmness admitted of no question.

"I am so happy," said the wife, and she lingered in his arms, saying, asking nothing more.

And now as the curtain is about to fall on the final scenes, we see Mrs. Weedahl in the home of her old age at Berylwood. Burned in the crucible of sin, she has emerged therefrom purified in a wisdom, the acquisition of which cost her every joy of life save the apples of dust she had sought with her gold. She has learned life's lessons, and unlike the mortal who becomes wise only when in his last hour he calls on God, she lingers to point the way. As a teacher of morality in whom sin has died Nature's death, her better self only remains, and the power of her wealth, though dishonestly acquired by an unseen agency that ever proves the existence and justice of God, is now used to succor suffering humanity. She knows—she has felt, she has learned so much, that in her ripe age she seems unerringly to feel the true pulse beats of the world, and to penetrate without effort its mask of vanity and deceit. As thus in solemn grandeur and state, she awaits the final summons, she would seem a fitting exponent of the words uttered by Lord Woolsey to Cromwell,

"Say I taught thee,—

Say Woolsey—who once trod the ways of glory —

And sounded all the depths and shoals of honor —

Found thee away out of his wreck to rise in —

A sure and safe one though the master missed it."

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